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PHILIP MURRAY, COLDLY LOOKING AT HER, TOOK OFF HIS HAT AND PASSED ON, WITHOUT ONE WORD.

TRUE GOLD.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A LOVERS' MEETING.

"WHY, Vic, where are you going?" asked Marion Silvester as she entered her cousin's room just in time to see her placing a coquettish little hat upon her well-shaped head, and surveying herself in a cheval glass with evident satisfaction.

"You know well enough where I am off to, Marion, without asking any questions," returned Victoria Barrington, laughing. "And now, like a dear old girl, just tell me if I shall do!"

"Of course you will, you small sprite; and now I suppose there will be nothing more seen of you for the next two hours. I only hope auntie

won't want you, for I shall not know what to say to her."

"You may say anything you like, as long as you don't tell her the truth, for if she once found out that I met dear old Phil, and had those lovely walks with him, she would never let me out of her sight. That is the worst of old maids; they seem to have no hearts at all, and expect all the world to be like themselves. I really believe auntie would wish me to sit with her from morning till night, and do nothing but talk goody, and work at those endless flannel petticoats for her pet mission. Why, if it were not for you, Marion, what an awful life I should lead!"

"And yet, Vic," replied her cousin, quietly, "I am sure auntie is very fond of you, and would be glad to see you happy; but she certainly does not like the Murrays, and would not care to hear of the growing intimacy between you and Philip. Of course you know your own business best, little Vic; but, like auntie, I took a dislike to them at our first interview. The mother is too

grand altogether, and there is an underhand manner about Edith which I do not understand; and as for Philip, I consider he is an arrant flirt, and I would not believe a word he says."

"I would," replied Vic, warmly. "Phil and I are the best of friends, and I will not hear anything against him; in my opinion he is perfect."

"I am sorry you think so, little woman. I only hope he may ever continue to merit your good opinion; but as for you two being friends, you can't take me in so easily, you scamp. You're about as much friends as—"

"As you and Felix Emerson," retorted Vic, laughing; "don't try and look so innocent, Marion, for you know I caught you together in the lovers' walk the other day, and I have not forgotten what I heard you say."

"Vic, you are a little wretch. What did you hear?"

"Ah, that would be telling too much; never mind, Marion, as long as you keep my secrets I'll not betray yours. But if you don't help me as much as you can, won't I split, that's all!"

And throwing her arms around her cousin's neck she gave her a hearty kiss; then running out of the room before she could reply to her, went downstairs, and across the well cut lawn into the shrubbery beyond.

"Five minutes late, darling!" said a handsome young fellow, as Vic appeared round the corner. "I had almost given you up."

"As long as you do not quite, I don't care," she answered, glancing up at him brightly; "and now that I have come, what have you to say to me?"

"That you look prettier every time I see you, little Vic."

"Is that all?" she laughed.

"No, not all, dearest! I love you more every day. Indeed, I could not live without you now."

"I see no reason why you should try to do so," she replied, with a glorious light shining from her bright blue eyes.

"Yes, Vic, there are reasons. I am not rich, you know, and I should be too proud to ask you to share my poverty. If I had only money, darling, I should never let you out of my sight," and he drew her gently to him.

"Don't let the need of money keep you away from me, Phil. I do not shrink from being poor if you do not."

"My sweet darling," he answered softly, "but I am only making three hundred a year. Could you live on that?"

"Indeed I could," returned the girl, with a smile passing over her sweet face, for she knew she was her aunt's heiress, and that however small her lover's income might be, it could not affect her in any way. But she was glad to think Philip Murray did not know of her expected wealth, and determined not to tell him of it, feeling she would rather be won for herself alone.

"I hardly think you would be able to manage it, little Vic. I am afraid you are an extravagant young woman, and would require all my earnings to dress upon, for I don't believe I ever see you twice in the same costume!"

"Oh! that is auntie's fault; she is always giving me new things, and of course I like to put them on when I come out to see you; but I should be well content to be economical if I could please you by being so."

"Well then, darling, you will have to try what you can do, for I expect I shall put you to the test before long; for Vic, my little Vic, you don't know how I love you, child;" and taking her in his arms he kissed her again and again.

"Oh! Phil," she said, "I am so — so happy!"

"I am glad of that, sweet one," he answered, tenderly; "but you must keep our secret; no one must know of our love, my pet. To the world we must be friends—nothing more; do you understand, dear?"

"Yes, Phil; I will not mention anything you do not wish me to do. Of course I should like everyone to know that you care for me; but, after all, it has more to do with ourselves than anyone else, hasn't it?"

"Much more, little Vic; and you will have to be very patient, and wait a long time till I can claim you. Do you think you will grow tired of me, sweetest?"

"Never, dear; rest assured while my life lasts I shall love you with my whole heart—I could not change."

"My own true darling!" he replied, earnestly, "I only wish I could have an open engagement, but at present it is impossible."

"Why, dear Phil? Can you not tell me your reason? I would like to have your confidence."

"No, Vic; you must not question me, if you love me, child, you must have trust in me too."

"As you will," she answered, with a shadow of regret in her voice. "I will believe whatever you do is for the best."

"That is right, dearest, and I have no doubt it will all end well for us some day. But you must be very careful, and not give anyone cause to suspect there is more than friendship between us."

"Very well, Phil," she replied, laughing. "If this is friendship, dear, I should be perfectly contented to have nothing more all my life."

And now good-night, old boy; it is getting dark, and I must go in."

"Good-night, darling!" he replied, and after one long kiss they parted.

When Philip Murray returned home his sister met him in the hall with an eager look upon her face.

"Have you seen Nora?" she asked. "Mary says she came here about an hour ago, and on being told you were in the garden she went out to look for you."

"What business had Mary to tell her where I was?" he answered, impatiently. "Another time order her to show Nora in to the drawing-room, and let her wait till I come in. I suppose she is still walking about, and nice and tired she'll be, poor girl," and he turned to go out of the door again.

"May I come with you?" said Edith Murray. "We might as well walk together until we find her, and then I suppose you would rather have my room than my company."

"Undoubtedly I should," he returned coolly; "but as I want to talk to you, you may as well join me now."

"You are a nice sort of brother to have," she answered, laughing; "politeness is certainly not one of your strong points."

"Very likely," he said, indifferently. "I don't think it runs much in our family."

"Speak for yourself, old boy," she retorted, smiling; "but I did not come out with you to discuss either how nice or how nasty we were, but simply to hear whether you met Vic to-night."

"Of course I did," he replied, impatiently. "I knew I was going to meet her, and if you had been a sister worth having, you would have taken care Nora didn't come to look for me."

"I hardly see that I am to be blamed for that," she answered, "for none of us expected her down before next week, and I can't think what made her alter her plans."

"Nor can I, Edith," he replied, gravely; "but where do you suppose she is now; for we have been very nearly round the grounds, and she is nowhere to be seen at present?"

"I will go and ask Thomas," she answered.

"I saw him watering the greenhouse just now; perhaps he has seen her," and without another word she ran across the lawn to question the gardener.

In a few minutes she returned, and told Philip that Thomas had noticed Nora going down the moss path about an hour ago, and after a short time she had retraced her steps, and had taken the nearest road towards the station.

"It is a great nuisance about Nora coming down to-night unexpectedly; but I will very soon put things all right with her. I suppose she saw me walking about with Vic, and did not like to join us."

"I hope you were not being very loving," said Edith, laughing; "if you were, it is no wonder Nora went away."

"Be good enough to keep your jokes to yourself," replied her brother, coldly. "Vic and I are only friends, nothing more."

Philip Murray turned a shade paler as he spoke, that was all; but he was not the man to lose his self-possession, especially in his sister's presence, as she was far keener sighted than he cared about, and had already learnt more than he wished her to know about his affairs; but he was aware that she was devoted to him, and would not talk, at least against his interest; so he sometimes found it convenient to make her useful, and at the present moment he needed a little assistance.

"Oh! indeed?" replied the girl, in a malicious tone of voice. "Then I wonder you do not go and call upon her at her aunt's house, instead of having clandestine meetings in the shrubberies."

"When I want your opinion I will ask for it," he said, in the same hard voice. "You are getting a great deal too talkative, Edith, and I have a good mind not to tell you anything more."

"You need not fear me, dear old boy," she said, in her most coaxing manner. "I have never deserted you, and I think you might trust me now. I know you really love Nora, Phil;

but Vic has the money, and the creditors are becoming rather impatient. That is how the land lies, isn't it?"

"Yes; you're pretty near the mark, Edith. Langley says he can't wait any longer, and Taylor and Hamilton the same, and I'm altogether in a terrible mess. I am going to see them all to-morrow, and ask them to give me another year, and if they will only do that, I may be able to settle something before then; if not, I must be missing when the time comes."

"Don't say that," said Edith, with feeling; for she really cared for her brother more than for anyone else in the world. "We could not spare you, Phil; it would be much wiser of you to marry Vic, and pay your debts comfortably with her money."

"It is all very well to talk of Vic's wealth, Edie, but I don't feel quite sure it is not all a 'myth.' I fished about the subject a great deal to-night, and she quite spoke as if she had no expectations."

"You don't mean it, Phil! Oh, it can't be true! Why, a number of people have told us that she is Miss Lawrence's heiress!"

"Yes; but it may be only talk. And as for numbers of people, we really know scarcely anyone in the place; we are only going from what we have heard from the servants, and they are very likely to have made some mistake. Vic is a very nice girl, with a large fortune at her back; but I should be sorry to have anything to do with her without it. The thing is, how am I to find out the truth. Can you help me?"

"I think I can, Phil. I will call upon her to-morrow, and I will let you hear the result in the evening. Will that do?"

"Splendidly!" he returned; "and now we must go in to supper, as the mater is waiting for us, and we are already late."

CHAPTER II.

OLD MAIDS HAVE HEARTS.

"AUNTIE," said Vic, the following morning. "I have had a letter from Lancelot Silvester, saying he is coming down to-day. Shall I order the spare room to be prepared, and then all would be ready if he likes to stay?"

"If you wish it, my dear," answered Miss Lawrence, kindly. "Marion is a good girl, and I will always welcome her brother for her sake."

"And his own, auntie, for you know he is a great pet of yours."

"Yes, he is a nice lad, and as long as he is contented here he can remain; but there is not much to amuse a young man at Bracondale."

"Why, auntie, there's you," replied Vic, mischievously. "What more can he want?"

"A great deal more, I should say, my dear," replied Miss Lawrence, smiling; "but, perhaps, his Cousin Vic thinks she can make up for my deficiencies—eh, child?"

"You dear old lady!" said Vic, throwing her arms around her aunt's neck. "Lance and I understand each other perfectly. We are cousins, and nothing more, so don't make insinuations."

"My dear, I never made any insinuations. It is a case of guilty conscience, I am afraid. Why, Vic, what are you blushing about? If you care for him you need not hide the fact from me, as there is nothing which would please me better than to see you two marry. He is a fine young fellow, and I would rather my sister's son should share my fortune with you than any other."

"Would you, auntie! That is very kind of you; but the worst part of it is he has never asked me; so you see, until he does, I can neither accept or refuse him, can I?"

"Of course not, child, you are right not to think of any man unless he has really proposed to you; but I considered it just as well you should know my wishes on the subject."

"Quite as well," returned Vic, with a merry twinkle in her eyes; "and if he does not ask me, auntie, it won't be my fault, for I'll give him plenty of opportunities."

"My dear Vic, I hope you'll do nothing of the sort. I should indeed be shocked if you gave Lancelot cause to think you were running after him."

"Don't be alarmed, auntie, I won't do anything very dreadful; he shall do all the running after me, and I'll go quietly on, and pretend I don't see him coming; and let him catch me if he wishes to do so; and then I must seem to be very much surprised, and tell him he had better consult you first. Would that do?" queried the girl, going into peals of laughter at Miss Lawrence's distressed expression of face.

"I cannot understand you, Vic, and I can only trust you are not so flippant as you pretend to be. Love is no laughing matter, child; to some it brings exquisite happiness, and makes their lives on earth a perfect Paradise; to others it causes nothing but sorrow and disappointment, and that trouble, when once experienced, is never likely to be forgotten."

"Auntie, dear old auntie," said Vic, lovingly, "surely you have never known such sorrow? I have always thought you were too cold to love anyone very much."

"Coldness is often a cloak worn to hide a broken heart, my child, and that is generally the reason why old maids are thought so disagreeable. They have most of them had some great grief, and have shut themselves out from the world in consequence, and refused all sympathy, until their friends have grown tired of them; and they soon find there is no one left to care for them; so putting on the armour of reserve to help them bear their trial secretly, they go through life, unloving and unloved."

"Auntie, do tell me, have you had some deep heart sorrow, and have not told me all these years? Oh! why did you not let me comfort you before?" and the girl knelt beside her aged protectress, and laid her head affectionately upon her breast.

"You have been too young, Vic, to understand such things, and I should not have told you now, had I not wished you to look at your future in a serious light."

"You dear old lady, I am serious enough; but I must have my little jokes even with you and Cousin Lance," replied Vic, smiling; "and you would not like me to be always quiet, would you, auntie?"

"Perhaps not, my child; but I should be grieved to see you flirt even with Lancelot Silvester, and still more sorry to see him flirt with you. There are more lives wrecked through useless flirtation than you can realise. Men like to amuse themselves with girls they admire, without one thought of what suffering they may cause them in the future; so don't look upon love as sport, Vic, but as the most serious thing in your life."

"I will, dear auntie," replied the girl quietly; "and now will you tell me your history? I should so like to hear it."

"Well, Vic, as you really wish it, I suppose I must give you my confidence, but do not speak of it afterwards, even to me, for, old as I am, the subject is still painful to me."

"You can rely upon my silence," answered the girl gently, and then clasping Miss Lawrence's hand she said no more.

"Forty-five years ago I was just your age, Vic, and the world seemed bright to me indeed. I was the youngest of my family, and was made a great pet of; my will seemed to be law amongst them all, and I did not know what care meant. Three of my sisters married, and then there was only Bertha, your dear mother, left to keep me company, and we were inseparable. She was just one year my elder, and it was settled we should come out together, and I shall never forget my first ball. It was there I met the love of my life, and for a short time at least I was intensely happy."

"What was his name, auntie?" asked Vic, with interest.

"Roderick Napier, and I think he was the handsomest man I ever saw. He was tall, and well built, decidedly dark, and he had powerful mesmerist eyes, which seemed to compel you to love him, and draw you under his influence, even against your will. Well, that evening he gained

an introduction to your grand-parents, who took a fancy to him at once, and invited him to their house, after having ascertained from a friend of his that he was a man of good family and position. At that time we were very well off, and Roderick lost no opportunity of making himself agreeable to me; in fact, he was my shadow; there was never a day that he was not with me, and although he had not really asked me to be his wife, there is no doubt he would have done so, if my father had not suddenly lost his money; but when misfortune came, he deserted me, and I never heard of him again, until I saw his marriage in the papers."

"Oh! auntie, how you must have suffered," said Vic. "But surely he did not leave you because he knew you would be poor. Did you have no quarrel, no misunderstanding?"

"Not a word, my dear, no one could have been more loving than he was the last time we met, and I was so wildly happy, but my sunshine was too bright to last, and when I knew the truth, I thought my heart would have broken; but I found to my regret that sorrow does not kill, and I had to live, whether I wished it or no. Perhaps it was well that I had very little leisure to think about myself and my troubles, for I had at once to set to work and find employment, and I decided at length to enter a hospital as nurse; and I got on very well for some time, and took great interest in the poor sufferers around me. But after three years my health failed me, and the doctors said I had not strength for such continual pressure, and a lighter situation was found for me, which I gladly accepted. I went to take care of a dear old gentleman who was paralysed, and lived with him for twenty-five years, when he died; and so grateful was he for all my attention to him, that he left me the whole of his fortune, and this estate, and once more I was a rich woman. But my troubles were not to end there, for just at that time your dear mother, who had been married for about ten years, died from scarlet fever, and your father and your brother soon followed her, and you were left a tiny baby with no one to look after you; so I brought you home with me, little Vic, and you have been my child ever since."

"Oh! auntie, how good you have been to me!" cried Vic. "I will never think you are cold again, and I feel I could not live without you."

"You will have to, some day, little Vic; and when I am gone you will be a rich woman, for I have left you all my fortune, which I hope you will make good use of. Will you try, dear?"

"Indeed I will, auntie; but why should you make me your heiress? Surely it would be better to divide your money into three portions, and give Lance, and Marion, and me each a part; it hardly seems fair that I should have it all."

"Why, Vic; do you want to refuse such a gift as the Bracendale Estate? No, child, you are my favourite niece, and I wish you to inherit my property. If you want Lance to share it, you had better marry him. I have already told you I should be greatly pleased at the match; but if it cannot be, the young man must work, and make a home for himself. And as for Marion, if she does not soon settle, I will leave her two thousand pounds, which with the fifty pounds a year she inherited from her mother will keep her from want, if not in luxury."

"Auntie, why should you care for me so much more than for the other two? We three are equally related to you."

"Quite so, little Vic; but I have brought you up as my own child, and until six years ago I never saw the others, for their mother—my sister Gertrude—was my senior by many years, and when she married she went immediately out to New Zealand with her husband, and lived there all the rest of her life. And when she became a widow she wrote and asked me to look after her children, if anything should happen to her also. But she lived for some time after that, and when she died she left Lancelot two hundred a year, and Marion fifty, so they both have a little, although not much. Marion, as you know, has lived with me ever since, and will continue to do, so as long as I am spared, unless she marries. And Lancelot has his own rooms near the War Office, where he was fortunate enough to obtain

a clerkship. I give him a hundred a-year for pocket-money, and if you wish it very much, I will leave him two thousand pounds as well as Marion. Will that please you, Vic?"

"I would rather you made it five thousand, auntie," said Vic, smiling.

"Nonsense! my dear," said Miss Lawrence, half amused and half vexed. "If I give away all my fortune how is Bracendale to be kept up? And now I have not time to talk to you any more to-day, for I want to drive over to Market Handbury to do some shopping."

"Shall I come with you, auntie? I don't like your going alone."

"Not to-day, dear child; you must remain at home with Marion to welcome Lancelot. And now run away, for I have a letter to write, and it is just lunch time."

"Very well, auntie," replied Vic. "I will not torment you any longer," and after giving Miss Lawrence a loving embrace, she went up to her own room to take off her morning dress.

CHAPTER III.

VIC PRETENDS TO BE POOR.

MISS LAWRENCE'S carriage was scarcely out of sight when the butler announced Miss Murray was in the drawing-room.

"What a bother!" cried Vic, as soon as this solemn functionary had withdrawn. "I hope she won't remain long, or we shall not be able to drive down in the dogcart to meet Lance at the station."

"Well, put on your hat, and say you are going out," replied Marion; "she could not stop then, particularly if you tell her you have to meet a train."

"No, I suppose not; but I hardly like to do so, because she is Phil's sister, you see."

"Oh, that's it, is it, Vic? Well, then, run in to her at once, and I will go and meet Lance by myself."

"You had better wait for me, Marion, as auntie does not much approve of either of us driving alone. It really is very unfortunate; but it can't be helped, and if she does not go in ten minutes, we will send Alfred off with the luggage cart, and then Lance can either drive or walk, as he pleases."

"Yes, that will do excellently; and now, dear, we must really go to Miss Murray, or she will say we kept her waiting while we were 'tivating.'"

"Well, for once she would be mistaken; though I really wish I had on a simpler costume, but I put this on in order to 'mash' Lance."

"Vic, I am ashamed of you," said Marion Silvester, laughing; "but it is the first time I have ever heard you regret being handsomely dressed, and I fail to understand your reason for it now, as Philip Murray's sister is waiting to see you."

"That is just it, old girl. Do you know I want them all to think that I am poor, and in future I shall always wear something simple when I go to meet Phil. I have a fancy to be won for myself; it would be dreadful to me to be sought for by money."

"I think you are right, Vic; that would at least prove the young man. So he is trying to win you, you sly fox. You have let the cat out of the bag at last," said Marion, laughing.

"You are too sharp altogether," said Vic, with pretended vexation; "he has won me already—for a friend, nothing more."

"Of course, dear," replied Marion, laughing again; "and now are you coming, or shall I go and say you have a headache? I am really getting quite clever at telling 'fish' for you, and no wonder, for you keep me well up to the mark."

"You are a wretch," said Vic, slipping her arm through her cousin's; "but I should not like to be without you for all that; and now let us go to Edith, or she will be tired of waiting."

"I should fancy she was that long ago," returned Marion; "but I really think you had better despatch Alfred, for she certainly won't leave at present."

"A wise suggestion, dear," said Vic, ringing the bell at the same time; and after having given her orders, the two girls crossed the hall, and entered the drawing-room.

"I am so sorry to have kept you waiting," said Vic, graciously, as she shook Edith's hand warmly; "but I was unable to come in before, as I had to see about the cart being sent off to meet Marion's brother. I think you have seen my cousin before, have you not?"

"Yes, I have the pleasure of knowing Miss Silvester," said Edith Murray; and the two girls, who had a mutual antipathy to each other, coldly extended the tips of their fingers in greeting.

Then Edith turned once more to Vic.

"I have come begging," she laughed. "I take a great interest in the Oshygan mission, and they are in a terrible state just now for want of funds. Our London clergyman has written to know if I can assist him in getting up a subscription, for the poor things are all starving to death, and if five thousand pounds are not sent out immediately it will be too late to save them. No smaller sum would be of any use, for it is an immense territory, and thickly populated."

"How very sad!" said Marion. "If the accounts are true, I think something should be done. Anyway, I will give you a pound towards it," and taking her purse from her pocket she handed a sovereign to Edith. "I am sorry it is not more, Miss Murray, but it is all that I can afford to do."

"Indeed, I am most grateful," replied Edith. "I never expected you would give me anything. It was really Miss Barrington who I hoped would help me, and I still trust she will do so."

"You have come to the wrong person," said Vic, smiling. "Marion is the Oshygan; I am as poor as the proverbial church mouse."

"Surely you are joking, Miss Barrington!" replied Edith, with her eyes wide open. "You cannot mean what you say!"

"Why not?" answered Vic, quietly, for she was struck by the look of almost dismay upon her visitor's face, and determined to carry on the part she was playing.

"Because I have always heard that you were Miss Lawrence's heiress," returned Edith, forgetting to be cautious in her excitement. "Everyone says so!"

"Do they?" laughed Vic. "Then it is a pity people should talk of what does not concern them. I always find, Miss Murray, that what the world says is incorrect. My dear aunt has been kind enough to bring me up, but I must soon look out for a fresh home now; and I am thinking of advertising for a situation."

"Dear me!" said Edith. "I am surprised; what stupid mistakes are made. Then I suppose they really meant you instead of Miss Barrington," she continued, turning to Marion.

"I always keep my affairs to myself, Miss Murray," answered Marion Silvester. "I never take any interest in other people's business, and I object to their interfering with mine."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Edith, growing very red. "I did not intend to offend you, but knowing Miss Barrington so well, I naturally took a pleasure in talking of her welfare."

"Marion is only in fun," said Vic, beginning to feel very uncomfortable at the turn the conversation was taking; but before she had time to say another word, the door was suddenly thrown open, and an eminently handsome young man had entered the room.

Edith was sitting behind a small screen, and he could not see her, so he did not hesitate to make a rush at the two girls, who had both stepped forward to meet him, and throwing his arms around them he gave them a giant's hug.

"Well, I am glad to see you!" he exclaimed, gaily; then he gave Marion a hearty embrace, and released her. "Now Vic, it is your turn," he continued, laughing at his cousin's strenuous efforts to get away.

"Do be quiet, Lance!" she said, in an undertone, giving him a furious pinch.

But Lancelot's back was still turned towards Edith, and although she had come from behind

the screen to look at what was going on, he did not see her, and thought that Vic was only trying to cheat him out of his usual kiss.

"None of your jokes, my dear!" he said. "I mean to have one," and taking her pretty little head in both his hands he very nearly smothered her with kisses.

"Lance!" said Marion, in a voice shaking with laughter—for it was most ridiculous to watch poor Vic's struggles for freedom—and at any other time she would thoroughly have enjoyed the scene, but with Edith Murray gazing at them with her cold, grey eyes, she was anxious to put an end to it as quickly as possible.

"Lance!" she repeated, louder, "let me introduce you to Miss Murray; I don't think you can be aware that she is in the room!"

In a second, Vic was dropped like a hot potato, and he turned round with a slight fish over-spreading his manly face; but young though he was, he had a great deal of self-possession, and as soon as the introduction was over, he commenced talking away with perfect composure.

"Marion is right," he began. "I did not see you, Miss Murray, or I should not have entered the room quite so like an overgrown schoolboy."

"I hope you will not mind me," replied Edith, quietly; "it was most amusing to see your battle with Miss Barrington, but I fear she did not enjoy it as much as I did."

"I did not enjoy it at all," laughed Vic. "Cousins are horrid things to have, Miss Murray. I hope for your sake you do not own any!"

"I believe I have a few," she answered, carelessly, "but I have not the honour of their acquaintance."

"What a blessing for you," retorted Vic, smiling, "at least if they are anything like Lance."

"I don't think you seem to object much to Mr. Silvester," she replied, with a malicious ring in her voice which made Vic colour.

"You are right, Miss Murray," said Lancelot Silvester, noticing the confusion of his little favourite. "Vic and I are like brother and sister, and I hope we shall always continue to be so."

"Are you," she replied, coldly. "Well, all I can say is, I am glad my brothers do not treat me in the same way. And now, good-bye, Miss Barrington; I am sorry you are unable to help me with the mission, but if you can't, it is, of course, no fault of yours."

"No, it is impossible," said Vic, shaking her hand, and then she rang the bell.

"Good-bye, Miss Silvester; thank you for your generous contribution."

"You are quite welcome," said Marion, smiling at the satire of her remark.

Lancelot moved towards the door, and, opening it, bowed coldly to her as she passed out of the room, and seeing the butler was there to attend to her, he quickly returned to his sister and cousin.

"What an awful girl!" he said. "Wherever does she live?"

"Do be careful, old boy," replied Vic; "she really has not gone yet, and may hear your remarks through the open window."

"Well, really, I shouldn't much mind if she did, for I never took such a dislike to anyone in my life as I did to her at first sight. I could believe anything of her; I hope she is not a friend of yours, Vic, or Marion's either."

"I think Marion mistrusts her as much as you do," replied Vic, gently. "As for myself, I do not know enough about her to form an opinion, but as she is our next-door neighbour, I always try to be civil to her."

"You don't mean to say they have taken Briarbank," said Lancelot in dismay. "She is indeed unpleasantly close. I could imagine her standing on the other side of the hedge, to listen to what we were talking about."

"Well, then, dear, don't tell me any of your secrets in that part of the garden, and then it won't matter if she does," laughed Vic. "And now come and have some lunch, for I am sure you must be very hungry; I never saw you so fierce before!" and giving him her hand she pulled him out of the depths of an easy chair into

which he had thrown himself, after his last remarks.

"Thanks, old lady, I'll come if you will promise to sit with me while I am feeding, will you, dear!" he asked, smiling down at her.

"Of course I will, you rascal, and Marion will come too."

"I am not so sure of that," said Marion, smiling, getting up from her seat at the same time, and slipping her arm round her cousin's waist. "Perhaps I'm not wanted," she continued, looking mischievously at her brother, "for Lance did not invite me."

"But you know I always want you, dear," said Lancelot Silvester kindly, and the three went off and sat in the dining-room, chatting merrily until they heard the wheels of the brougham draw up at the front door.

"Why, here's auntie!" cried Vic, looking out of the window, and they ran out to meet her and give her a hearty welcome home.

CHAPTER IV.

A GOOD REUSE.

PHILIP MURRAY returned home that afternoon, with a discontented look upon his face. He had had a troubled day, and it had not improved his frame of mind.

In the morning he had been to call on Nora Mackenzie, the girl he really cared for, and who had been engaged to him for the past two years—ever since the death of her mother; but although he loved her better than anyone else in the world, he had quite made up his mind to give her up for Vic if she had a sufficient fortune to satisfy him, but until he should ascertain the extent of her wealth and expectations, he wished to keep Nora in his power; so feeling she might be annoyed at having seen him in the shrubby walk, talking to another girl, he went up by an early train, and arrived at Nora's house just as she and her father had finished breakfast, and he had been shown into their little drawing-room which, if not handsomely furnished, was very elegant and pretty.

And there Nora joined him, but how changed from the devoted girl he had parted with one week before!

She bowed to him slightly when he came forward to meet her, and apparently never saw the hand he held out to her. She did not ask him to sit down, but looking at him coldly, inquired if he had come to fetch the things he had left in her keeping.

There were not many, but they were the only valuables he possessed in the world, and when he quitted London for the summer months, he had begged her to take care of them for him until he returned, for fear he should lose them in a strange house with servants he knew nothing about.

"You know I have not," he replied, turning pale. "Nora, what is the matter with you to-day? You are not yourself," and he came closer to her, as if to take her in his arms; but she drew herself up with the dignity of a stately queen, and looked him steadily in the face.

"Mr. Murray," she said, "I decline to have any conversation with you. I am only glad I have found you out before it is too late; remember, our engagement is at an end; for after what I witnessed the other evening I will have nothing more to do with you. Here are your things; I was going to return them to you to-day by registered packet, but it will be better for you to take them yourself. You will find all the presents you have given me in a small box inside," and she handed the parcel to him.

Philip Murray stood looking blankly at her. She had ever been so gentle and yielding to his wishes, and in one day she had changed; and he knew, now that he had lost her, that he had never loved or admired her so much before.

"Nora, for Heaven's sake, listen to me!" he exclaimed. "I love you truly, my darling, and I can easily explain away the cause of your displeasure."

"Thanks!" she said, interrupting him; "I require no explanation, and I will receive none," and she rang the bell before he could speak again.

and left the room; and as the maid was already in the passage, and the door open, there was nothing left for him to do, but to take up his hat and his parcel and leave the house!

When Philip Murray took his seat in his office at the usual hour he could do no work. Never before had he felt so completely upset; and the head of his department, noticing how ill and worn he looked, advised him to go quietly home, and take a week's rest, and very gladly he accepted his friend's offer.

When out in the air again he felt somewhat better, and turning his steps towards the City, he soon found himself outside Langley's, the well-known money-lender; and he went in, to entreat him to wait for another year, but Mr. Langley would not listen to him at all. However, after much talking it was settled that he should pay one-half of the amount owing—namely, five hundred pounds—in six months' time, and the other half at the end of the year; and the matter having thus ended, Philip left the office with a lighter mind, saying to himself, "If Vic is worth anything she will pay him off before that," and he wended his way to his other creditors.

Hamilton was a first-class tailor at the West-end, and to him he owed two hundred pounds; and the owner of the shop being a kind-hearted man, and seeing how troubled Philip looked, promised to wait another twelve months on receiving a written assurance that the money should be paid at the expiration of that time. And lastly, he went to Crawford's, his bootmaker, to whom he owed fifty pounds, and got a year's reprieve from him also; but for all that he was utterly miserable, and he returned home early in the afternoon, feeling he had only one card to play, and that was Vic; and if she proved worthless he determined to quit the country.

So when Edith re-entered Briar-bank, after her visit to Bracondale, she found her brother walking about in the garden, looking the picture of discontent.

"Why, Phil!" she exclaimed, "you are back early; I did not expect you till seven, and it is only half-past three."

"Yes! I have a week's holiday; my chief, thinking I looked ill, told me I had better have a rest."

"How very kind of him!" said Edith, warmly; "and now if you are tired come in," and they went into the house together, and going into the morning-room, they sat down to have a talk.

"Have you been to see Vic?" asked Philip, looking anxiously at his sister.

"Yes, Phil, I have," replied the girl quietly.

"And what did you discover?" queried the young man, in an impatient voice.

"Nothing good," said Edith, nervously, for she was decidedly afraid of her brother when anything annoyed him. "It has all been a mistake, Phil; Vic's own words were 'that she was as poor as a church mouse.'"

"What made her say so?" he demanded roughly. "Surely you were not stupid enough to go and ask her!"

"Of course not," she replied, "but I took a subscription list round, and asked Vic to help me, and she said she could not do it; then she told me her aunt had brought her up, and she was now going to look for a situation."

"Are you sure?" said Philip Murray, in a tone of dismay; "perhaps she was only laughing at you."

"No; I am certain she meant it," replied Edith, "for I asked her if she was joking, and she assured me she was not."

Now Vic had never said she was not in fun, any more than she had said she was going to look for a situation, although in mischief she had led Edith to understand her so; and thus it is, when things are repeated, a very few words altered will make such a vast difference in the meaning of a sentence. So by the time Philip Murray heard of the conversation, it had come to Vic's having said "she was not joking, and that she was going to look for employment!"

"I am sorry for it," said Philip. "Then who on earth is Miss Lawrence going to leave her money to? Surely not to Miss Silvester!"

"I should not be at all surprised," returned

Edith, "but when I began to question her, she was so intensely rude I could say no more."

"I wish I could find out," said Philip, more to himself than to his sister.

"Why?" asked Edith. "Would you turn your attentions from one cousin to another? You're a clever fellow, Phil, but Marlon Silvester would not have you, I'm sure, and I should not wish you joy if she would. She would lead you a dreadful life with that overbearing manner of hers."

"Mind your own business, Edith," replied her brother, coldly. "I have no intention of asking Miss Silvester; it would not be fair on Vic to do so."

Edith regarded him silently for a few seconds, then went off into fits of laughter.

"Yes! You would think a great deal of Vic, if you once imagined you had a chance with Marlon Silvester, or anyone else who had money. No, Phil, you can't deceive me; you are not one of the high-minded sort."

"Thank you for your opinion, Edith. Have you anything more to say, complimentary or otherwise?"

"Yes. If you behave yourself I will tell you how you can get out of your friendship, as you call it, with Vic, with credit, or at least without dishonour."

"How!" asked Philip Murray, with interest, for he always liked to drop a thing in a high-handed kind of way, and pretend he was the injured party instead of the offending one.

"Well!" continued Edith, "Marlon Silvester's brother came down while I was there, and he is evidently very fond of Vic, for he did not see me, and he threw his arms around her and kissed her most affectionately."

"And what did Vic do?" asked Philip, with a smile.

"Oh! of course she made a fuss, but that was only because she knew I was in the room, and would tell you. She must have allowed him to be on most intimate terms with her before, or he never would have attempted such a liberty; so take my advice and watch her. She is sure to be running about with this young man, and then you can affect righteous indignation, and discover that any girl who would speak to another man besides yourself is not the sort of wife you would choose to have," and again she laughed heartily.

"Capital! Edith, you are sharper than I took you to be. Vic will not be looking for me during the daytime, and I shall be sure to meet her about somewhere, taking a walk with young Silvester, and then will be my chance. And now I'll go and smoke a cigar," and without another word he left the room.

The following morning Vic and her Cousin Lance went off for a stroll alone, for Marlon had a headache, and did not care to accompany them.

"Now," said Vic, as soon as they were away from the sight and earshot of the village, and had entered a country lane, "how is Kitty? I have been longing to ask after her, but have never had an opportunity."

"She is very well, thank you, dear; but she is still in France, and I don't believe her parents will let her come back for the next few years."

"Never mind, Lance, it will soon be over, and then, I suppose, you will marry and settle down."

"I wish we could, Vic; but I fear there is no likelihood of any such happiness."

"Why, dear?" asked Vic, in surprise; "does she not care enough for you to marry you when she becomes of age, even without her parents' consent?"

"Quite enough, little Vic; but I will not let her quarrel with her relations for my sake; and so I shall work, and try to improve my position, and in time I hope they will give way. And the sooner they do the better, for Kitty and I intend to keep our engagement on, and the more opposition we meet with, the more determined we become. Old Hartland can't find any objection to me, except that I have not a thousand a-year, and he won't allow his daughter to begin life on less."

"I never heard such nonsense," said Vic, im-

patiently. "As long as you have sufficient to pay your way, I think it is far better for you than riches, which usually make people indolent and selfish, and to my mind a pretty, bright bijou cottage is much more homelike than a grand mansion."

"So it is, little Vic, and I am sure Kitty could keep up a comfortable little home on my present income, which amounts to just four hundred and fifty pounds; but, of course, to a man like Mr. Hartland that seems abject poverty, and the sum he has named barely enough to exist upon; still, he would consent to our union, I believe, if I could obtain that for certain."

"How very kind of him!" said Vic, laughing; "then why does he not give you that amount himself—he would not even miss it!"

"I would rather he did not, old girl. I should wish to support my own wife, and to know that she depends on me for everything."

"I can understand your feelings, dear," said Vic, smiling up at him. "I often regret I have a fortune in expectation, for I should rather feel I had to look to my husband for all things."

"Would you, Vic? Well, I always thought you were such an independent little soul, and that you would rather have sixpence of your own, than a pound of anyone else's."

"So I do in a general way; but I think when you love anyone very dearly those sort of ideas soon disappear."

"Vic, I never knew you so serious before. Tell me, dear girl, has Cupid at last shot an arrow even into your invulnerable heart?"

"Don't ask questions, Lance," she laughed, "or I might be tempted to tell you a big story."

"I can quite believe it," he replied, laughing too, and putting his arm through hers; "but confidence deserves confidence, you know. You are the only one in the world I have told about my Kitty except her own parents. I have never even named her to Marlon, and as I trust you so much, surely you can trust me?"

"I can," she replied, looking up at her cousin with a bright smile. "I do love some one very much, but at present it is a secret, so I cannot even tell you his name."

"And I will not ask you to do so, dear," replied Lance, gently, "and I earnestly wish you every blessing and happiness, and trust your lover may prove worthy of the prize he has drawn," and he stooped and kissed her brow.

They were in a shady lane, entirely shut in by trees on either side, and imagined themselves to be alone; and so intent had they been on their conversation that they had not seen a figure turn the corner of the road just in front of them, and in another second Vic was facing the man she well-nigh worshipped; and he, coldly looking at her, took off his hat, and passed on, without one word of greeting.

Philip Murray had been watching his opportunity all the morning, and noticing that Vic and her cousin took the quiet country lane for their ramble, determined to walk round in the other direction and meet them; but he never hoped for such a perfect success to his plan, and he smiled bitterly when he had passed her by. He told himself that Vic was indeed in the wrong now, and he felt glad she was so completely in his power.

Had he thought for a moment that Vic had money, he would have acted the injured lover to perfection, and after having made her very miserable he would have generously forgiven her.

But Edith had assured him that Vic was poor, and he was seeking an opportunity to get out of his engagement to her without discredit to himself, and certainly his chance had come.

But so inconsistent is human nature, that although Philip Murray had now no intention of marrying Vic, he felt really angry with her for her conduct, and told himself she could never blame him in any way; and if she was such a disgraceful flirt she would very soon forget all about him, and perhaps even now she had thrown him over for her cousin.

And he wended his way homeward, considering what his next move had better be, for money he must have, but how was he to get it?

"Who was that disagreeable-looking fellow?"

asked Lancelot Silvester, as soon as Philip Murray had passed out of hearing.

"He is Mr. Murray," answered Vic, quietly. "You saw his sister yesterday."

"Yes; and he is no better than she, I should say," replied Lance, "if one can judge by appearances."

"I should not trust to first impressions if I were you, Lance. I don't think there is anything against either of them; they seem nice people."

"Do they, Vic? Well, I am sorry to differ from your opinion of them, dear, but I would bet anything that that young man is a scoundrel; he carries it in his face!"

"Lance, don't say such things! I know him very well, and like him too!"

"Well, he did not look as if he liked you. I never saw such a diabolical expression of face before. One would almost imagine he hated you. Have you ever trodden on his pet corn, dear?"

"Perhaps I may have done so," replied Vic, trying to smile; "but I think he was astonished to see you kissing me out in the road, Lance; and really, dear, I wish you would not do such things, it puts me in such an awkward position."

"I am sorry I have displeased you, little Vic, but I did it without thought. My heart was full of prayer for your happiness at the time, and I never noticed anyone coming along, not that I can see what it had to do with Mr. Murray or anyone else, except that mysterious someone who is making my small cousin so very good and prim."

"I wish I were good," said Vic, wearily. "Let us walk across the fields home, Lance, I think it is nearer, and I feel tired."

"Are you unwell, dear?" said Lancelot, noticing for the first time all the colour had left Vic's face.

"I am all right," she replied, rousing herself. "I have a nervous headache, nothing more. I am sure to be better after lunch."

"I hope so," said her cousin, kindly, and they turned into the meadows, and were soon in sight of Bracondale.

CHAPTER V.

PARTED.

A FEW days afterwards Miss Lawrence noticed that Vic looked both pale and ill; and not knowing the secret trouble that was well-nigh breaking her heart, she thought she only wanted rousing, and determined she would give a ball in her own house, much as she disliked it, and try and cheer her.

And when Vic heard of her aunt's arrangement she could not decide if she were pleased or no, for she knew Miss Lawrence would invite Philip as well as her other acquaintances, and she dreaded meeting him, for although she had waited for him every evening in the garden he had never joined her, and she remembered with pain the glance of scorn he had given her when she had last seen him.

But Miss Lawrence knew nothing of her sorrow, and the invitations were sent off, and at last the night came and everything was ready.

"How nice you two girls look!" said Lancelot Silvester, entering the ball-room.

"I am glad you think so," returned Marion. "It is not often that brothers are complimentary."

"He is obliged to be so to-night," laughed Vic, "because he knows if he did not make himself agreeable we would not dance with him. Is not that it, Lance?"

"Of course it is, old lady; and how many will you give me? Let me write them on your programme at once; and taking one from the many piles of them, placed in various parts of the room, he wrote his initials in four places. "I must have the first waltz and the last, Vic," he said, smiling at her with a look of admiration and affection, "and two in the middle of the evening."

"Oh, no, Lance! not so many," she replied, for she knew that Philip Murray would be

watching her, and she feared he would again misjudge her.

"Why not, little woman?" he queried. "Don't I dance well enough?"

"Of course you do! It is not that, Lance, but you ought to pay attention to the other girls to-night, you know, as you are at home," she answered, looking up at him, and growing rosy-red at the thought of her small deception.

"If that is your only reason, dear," he rejoined, "I shall not let you off!" and handing her the card he took another himself, and marked her name upon it too.

"How many will you give me, Marion?" he asked, turning to his sister.

"The first extra if you like, Lance, but I can't spare you any more to-night."

"I see," he retorted, mischievously, "you prefer other people's brothers to your own."

"Only on particular occasions," she answered, naively, "and this is one of them. And now, Vic, our friends are arriving; come and do your duty," and the two girls went to their aunt's side, and welcomed their guests warmly.

And the room soon presented a gay appearance, as the girls in their bright costumes came trooping in, following the stately dames in more sombre attire.

"Will you give me this dance, Miss Silvester?" said a grave-looking young man, as the band of the regiment struck up the first chords of "Day Dreams."

"Certainly," replied Marion, with a happy smile; and in another moment she was gliding gently round the room, clasped in the arms of Felix Emmerson.

"Did you receive my letter this morning?" he asked, tenderly.

"I did," replied Marion, with drooping eyes and heightening colour.

"And what is my answer to be, dear?" he queried, scarcely above a whisper.

For a breathing space she did not reply, then said,—

"You are going to stay with us till to-morrow, Felix. I will talk to you quietly in the morning."

"Marion," he replied, earnestly, "come in here!" and he led her into a smaller apartment, which opened out of the ball-room, in which were arranged card-tables and chess-boards for those who did not care to dance.

"You must tell me my fate at once, sweet one! I could not wait a day longer. Why do you hesitate, my darling! Surely you love me just a little!"

"A great deal, dear!" she replied, with a joyous look; "but, Felix, I do not like to accept you. I shall ruin all your prospects in life."

"Not so, dear girl! I should have no pleasure in living if I could not have you always by my side. You are too true to play with any man's affections, Marion! So if you can say you love me, why not promise to be my wife?"

"Because, dear, your father would never give consent to our union; he told me as much the last time I saw him. He said he trusted you would marry well; and that it was necessary your wife should bring you a large fortune to help you clear off the heavy mortgages on your future estate. Of course, he did not say all that in those very words, but he took me for a walk round the garden, and in a general sort of way it all came out. Doubtless he guessed that we cared for each other!"

"Very likely, sweet one!" replied Felix Emmerson, "but neither my father nor anyone else shall ever keep me from the girl I love. Marion, my darling! give me the right to claim you for my own before all the world; and I will protect you from all care and annoyances. My father would most gladly receive you when he knew we were married."

"No, dear, do not tempt me," replied Marion, gently. "I love you too well to allow you to make such a sacrifice. Sir Raphael would never welcome me as a daughter, and he would most probably quarrel with you on my account, or if he even gave his sanction it would be with reluctance; and, Felix, I could not bear being tolerated by your relations."

"My proud pet!" he answered, laughing; "I admire you all the more for your spirit;

but tell me, darling, should my father raise no objections to our engagement will you really accept me then?"

"Most gladly," she replied, with a bright smile; "but, Felix, don't dwell upon the possibility of such happiness. I fear it is too good to be true."

"Not at all, my dearest; my parents will both love you for your own dear sake, and they will quickly see you are the best and truest girl on earth."

"You have too good an opinion of me, dear," replied Marion, taking his proffered hand. "You will find that I have many faults, and I should be sorry if you were disappointed in me."

"I could not be that, darling," he answered, gently placing his free hand around her slender waist. "My precious girl," he continued, earnestly, "if anything should part us now, I would never marry anyone."

"Nor I, Felix; I love you too well ever to forget you."

"Bless you for that, Marion," he said, fervently, and, stooping, he kissed her tenderly.

At that moment, Philip Murray entered the room in search of his sister, as he had forgotten to give her the fan he had been carrying in his pocket for her; and he stopped suddenly as he saw the lovers, who were standing in the bay window, behind a tall flower-stand covered with rare exotics and ferns, and as their backs were towards him they were unconscious of his presence. He stood for a minute to listen to their conversation, then turned round with an impatient gesture.

"Confound it," he muttered, "I am just too late. Marion Silvester is not the girl to change her mind; if she loves that fellow she will be true to him, and it would only be a waste of time to woo her," and passing into the ball-room he glanced hastily around in search of Vic, and his lip curled visibly as he beheld her dancing with her cousin. "Why need I spare her?" he thought; "a girl who would have two strings to her bow is not worth consideration, but I will make her suffer if I can; for what right has she to behave in the way she is doing, believing herself to be engaged to me," and he remained watching till the waltz was over, a great bitterness filling his heart.

He was angry with her for being the cause of the quarrel between Nora and himself, he was angry with her because he now imagined she was not an heiress; and, lastly, although he no longer wanted her, he felt exceedingly indignant at her appreciation of Lancelot Silvester. It wounded his pride to see her smile upon another, notwithstanding that he was glad of the excuse to get rid of her.

The waltz was at an end, and Vic was walking beside her cousin with a bright look. She had thoroughly enjoyed her dance; it seemed to arouse her from her gloominess, and make her forget her troubles—at all events, for the time being.

The exercise had brought back the roses to her cheeks, and never had she looked prettier, but here was not the sort of beauty Philip Murray admired—it failed to charm him.

Nora was his ideal, and she was tall and dark, with Grecian features, which she had inherited from her mother, who was a Greek woman. And little Vic, with her fairy-like figure and sunny face was quite her antithesis; for while Nora wore her hair in magnificent plaits, arranged classically around her graceful head, Vic gloried in masses of short, golden curls, which fell in natural waves and ripples, and her laughing blue eyes were thickly veiled with long, black lashes, surmounted by pencilled eyebrows of darkest brown.

She was altogether a bewitching little creature, and at that time she was looking her very best.

"That was a splendid dance, Vic," said Lancelot Silvester, looking down at her with a bright smile. "You just suit my step, and I shall make you give me all the extras, with the exception of the one which Marion has promised me."

"No, really, Lance; I can't let you have so many," she replied, laughing. "Auntie wishes us to be very attentive to our guests to-night—she told me so."

"Vic, that is only an excuse. I believe, dear, you want to save all your dances for that wonderful being you told me about, or, rather, wouldn't tell me about. Is it not that, you scamp? for I expect you have got Auntie to invite him, whoever he is. Oh!" he continued, laughing, "your blushes have betrayed you, dear, and I shall keep my eyes wide open, and try to discover which of the eligible bachelors you have chosen."

"Do be quiet, Lance," she said, somewhat impatiently, for she had just noticed Philip Murray gazing at her in cold disdain, and knew that he still misjudged her. She left her cousin's side, and held out her hand to him, which he accepted with icy politeness.

"What a cad!" thought Lancelot Silvester, turning away to avoid being introduced to him, and Vic and her lover were once more face to face.

"I am so glad you have come," said Vic, glancing shyly up at him.

"Thank you, Miss Barrington," he replied, in a mocking tone, "not that it appears my presence can affect your happiness in any way. You certainly appeared to enjoy 'Day-Dreams' without my assistance."

"I am very fond of dancing," replied Vic, with all the brightness fading from her face, "but I would gladly give it up if it would please you," she continued, in an under-tone.

"Really, Miss Barrington, I require no such sacrifice at your hands," he replied, with a visible sneer. "You should have been off with the old love before you were on with the new;" then, seeing by her sudden pallor that his shot had told, he turned and left her without another word.

Vic stood for some seconds almost paralyzed with grief, but she knew that she must arouse herself, and attend to her aunt's friends, and she did so with a great effort, and there was not a dance in which she did not join.

She never had appeared more sparkling, and she was sought by all present, except one, both on account of her graceful movements and light step, and for her saucy remarks and ready repartee, which amused and enchained her partners by turns.

But little Vic was miserable, notwithstanding her apparent gayness, for Philip Murray never so much as looked at her, and she felt as though her heart would break.

"I must speak to him," she told herself, continually, but the opportunity never seemed to come, and there was only one more waltz upon the programme, for which she was engaged to Lancelot Silvester; and feeling thoroughly weary, she was leaning against the conservatory door for support, when she heard a sound from within, and turned to see who was there.

It was Philip Murray, and with a wildly beating heart she went to his side.

"Phil!" she said, gently. "I am more than sorry if I have vexed you, and I have come to ask you to forgive me. But, dear, there has been some terrible misunderstanding between us; indeed—indeed, you have misjudged me!" and she laid her hand upon his arm, and looked pleadingly up into his face.

But he shook her off roughly.

"It is useless for you to try and deceive me, Miss Barrington," he replied, coldly. "I cannot have been mistaken in what I saw, and I shall be obliged by your understanding clearly that after your conduct, both in the lane the other day and to-night, our engagement must be at an end. Do not interrupt me, there can be no explanation to give. You are a clever actress, Miss Barrington, and you feign your sorrow as well as you did your love, but it is too late. There can never be anything between us now, so remember that you are free," and passing out of the conservatory he left her once more alone, and sinking into a chair she hid her face in her hands, and rocking herself to and fro, tried to restrain the tears which were falling fast.

"Vic, are you here?" said a cheery voice.

"Yes, Lance," she replied, quietly, "but I am so tired; do not ask me to dance any more."

He had entered the door, and was now standing by her side, and he saw that something was

wrong with her, and, stooping down, took her hand.

"Little Vic, you are in trouble!" he said, gently. "Do tell me what is the matter!"

"Don't ask me, there's a dear boy," she said, wearily; "but be sure you don't tell Auntie I am not well."

"I won't if you would rather she did not know, dear; but, Vic, do tell me what is your sorrow! Did not your lover come, for I never noticed you with one fellow more than with another."

"Yes, he came, Lance," and the tears began to fall again.

"Little Vic," he said, tenderly, "I can't bear to see you so upset. I fear you have quarrelled, dear. Tell me who he is, and let me bring him to you; he couldn't refuse to come, if he is worthy the name of man!"

"Hush, Lance! do not talk so," she replied. "I will never ask him to come back, as we have parted for ever!"

"Tell me his name, dear, and let me set things right for you!"

"Never," said Vic, firmly. "If anyone persuaded him to return to me I could not hold up my head again. I will receive no man's affection as a favour; so if he wishes to leave me let him."

"That is right, little woman," said Lancelot Silvester; "I am glad to see you have so much proper pride. And won't you let me know who this fellow is?"

"No, Lance; it could not do any good, and I would rather not tell you, so don't question me, there's a dear fellow."

"Very well, Vic, I won't bother you any more, and now come along into the ball-room, for Auntie won't like it if you are not there to say adieu to her friends."

And he helped her up, and they passed into the ball-room together.

"Keep my secret, Lance," she whispered.

"Of course I will, little Vic," he replied, quietly. "You need never be afraid to trust your cousin, Lance," and he smiled down at her kindly, and Vic gave him a grateful look in return.

CHAPTER VI.

SORROW.

THE ball had been a perfect success, and all were satisfied and pleased. Many had for the first time felt the thrill of love enter their light young hearts, and had returned to their homes in a state of dreamy bewilderment, that they should ever have considered themselves happy before.

As for Marion Silvester and Felix Emmerson, nothing could have surpassed their joy; and when they parted for a few hours' rest, Felix had promised to go to his father during the day, which had already dawned, and ask his consent to their engagement.

Vic, quite worn out with her exertions, and thoroughly weary in mind, went to her room as soon as she had seen her aunt comfortably in bed; and, when alone, she sank upon her knees, to pray for the help she so much needed, to enable her to carry the cross bravely which had been given her to bear, and she arose with a calmer mind, and began to take off the dress which had suited her so well, but now looked tumbled and disorderly.

"May I come in, dear!" said Marion, opening her door.

"Yes, do," replied Vic; "I am so glad to see you, as I wanted to tell you how delighted I feel that you and Mr. Emmerson seem so happy together. Marion, you accepted him to-night, did you not?"

"Yes, little Vic; Felix and I have promised to be true to each other, but I will only marry him on one condition."

"And what is that, dear?" asked Vic, looking up in surprise.

"That Sir Raphael receives me as a daughter willingly, and not as if he were going to make the best of a bad alliance."

"Why, of course he will welcome you, Marion,

and gladly, too, for who could help being fond of a good girl like you!" and she put her arms lovingly around her cousin's neck.

"I don't feel sure he will give his consent at all, Vic."

"Why, dear?"

"Because I have no money," she replied, a little bitterly.

Vic was silent for a few seconds; then she looked up, brightly.

"Marion, dear, I am certain it will be all right, and I feel so glad you are happy, dear! Felix is a nice fellow, and I think he will prove worthy of you."

"I am sure he will," answered Marion, with a joyous smile. "And now, Vic, tell me how you and Philip got on. I never saw you dancing with him at all."

"Do not question me, dear," said Vic, sadly. "Phil and I have parted, and now let us talk of other things. I don't want to throw a shadow over your sunshine with my troubles."

"Oh, Vic! I am so sorry; but surely you will make it up again—lovers always do!"

"We shall be the exception, dear," replied Vic, trying to smile; "and if he can treat me in the cruel way he has done, I think I am better without him."

"Poor little woman!" said Marion, kindly. "Was he cross because you were walking with Lance the other day?"

"Oh, no! It was not that altogether," replied Vic, the colour dyeing her pale, white cheeks. "I really think he did not like my dancing so much, but I was obliged to be civil to Auntie's guests."

"Of course you were," said Marion; "but, Vic, I don't believe it has anything to do with you at all. I fancy he has been trying to win you for the sake of your fortune, and when you pretended you had none he no longer wanted you."

"Oh, don't say that, Marion!" replied Vic, the tears coming into her eyes once more; "let me at least have the satisfaction of feeling that he loved me once. He surely could not have acted it all so well!"

"I am sorry to pain you, darling!" said Marion Silvester, gently; "but I fear what I say is true, because Felix knows all about him, and told me to-night that he was a dreadful rascal, and most fearfully in debt, and this year took to betting a great deal, and when he lost he grew reckless, and went in for such heavy stakes that he had to borrow several hundreds of pounds to pay them off, for he continued losing; and at last, as his luck did not turn, he was obliged to give up, and Felix says the only wonder is that he has not bolted long ago."

"Oh, Marion," said Vic, getting paler than ever, "and I might have saved him had he only told me the truth; and perhaps he does love me after all, but thinking I am badly off he would not take me away from Auntie, to share his poverty and his troubles."

"Vic, dear," replied Marion, gently, "put him out of your thoughts; he is not worthy of you in any way, he has never loved you, for Felix knows the girl he was engaged to, my poor child, and says he believes he really worshipped her."

Vic trembled like an aspen leaf; but she was determined to hear all.

"Marion," she said, "you tell me he was engaged; then why did he not marry the woman he loved—why did he give her up?"

"She gave him up, dear, because he was untrue to her."

"What do you mean?" asked Vic, wearily.

"I mean, little Vic, that Miss Mackenzie, for that is her name, came down to see him a short time ago, and finding him walking with you in a very lover-like fashion, she returned to town the same evening, and would have nothing more to do with him."

"Oh, Marion! how did Felix know all this? Perhaps he may be mistaken."

"Darling, there can be no doubt about it, for Felix is an intimate friend of the Mackenzie family, and Nora's father told him the whole story only last week, and says the girl is quite broken-hearted. Felix begged me not to tell

you, but I told him I would see how things were going with you; and finding you had already parted, I thought it was better you should know the whole truth."

"Much better," replied Vic, sadly; "and so he never cared for me, Marion, and only wanted my money. I am glad you have been wise enough to keep nothing back from me; but I should like to ask you one question more. How could Felix tell I was the girl Miss Mackenzie saw Mr. Murray with?"

"He guessed you were, dear, because the old man said it was in the walk between the two grounds that she saw them together, and asked if I thought it could be you, and if so to try and warn you about him, and not to let you believe in him, but, unfortunately, he was too late with his advice."

"Yes, much too late," said Vic, quietly; "and now, dear Marion, go and rest: it is selfish of me to have kept you up so late. Where will your room be?"

"Shall I stay with you, Vic?" asked her cousin gently, seeing how upset the poor girl looked.

"No, dear, thank you," replied Vic. "I would rather be alone, but I am none the less grateful for your kind thought of me," and giving each other a hearty embrace the two girls separated to take a few hours' repose.

"Oh! Phil! Phil!" moaned Vic, as soon as the door had closed, "you have broken my heart, and the thought that you have never loved me is the most cruel part of all to bear!" and undressing herself hastily she flung herself upon her bed, and like a tired-out child, cried herself to sleep.

When the little party assembled at breakfast later in the morning, Lancelot Silvester found a letter on the table awaiting him, and he opened it with a joyous face, for it was from his *fiancée*, Kitty Hartland—the girl he thought more perfect than any other in the world.

They had been pattern lovers, and ever since their first acquaintance had never had a single misunderstanding, and when Mr. Hartland had refused his consent to their union until Lancelot should be better off, they had quietly made up their minds to wait, and both were for a time content.

They knew they would be unable to see much of each other, because Mr. Hartland had decided to send his daughter to Paris until she should be one-and-twenty. But he had not forbidden them to write, so they had corresponded regularly, each sending a letter once a week. And thus a year had passed, and Lancelot Silvester was still working hard in the hope of making a home worthy of his ideal woman, believing her to be as steadfast and true as himself.

He had noticed of late a different tone in her missives, which had perplexed him greatly, and he had written her an open, manly letter, asking her to explain the change, and this was her answer, and he welcomed it gladly, little dreaming of the news it would contain. And hurriedly breaking the seal he read it through, turning pale the while with pain and suppressed passion. Then he perused it again as if he could not realize the truth of its contents, and so engrossed was he that he never heard his cousin Vic enter the room; and she, seeing the care marks which had gathered on his brow, went at once to his side.

"Lance, dear! what is the matter?" she inquired gently. "Do tell me," she continued, as he tried to turn away from her, "and let me help you if I can."

"Kitty is untrue to me," he answered, with forced composure. "She has written to say she has accepted Lord Sedbourne, who has ten thousand a year."

"Oh! I am so grieved for you, dear," replied Vic, putting her hand confidently into his. "Lance, I know what you must suffer, and I more than sympathize with you," and making him sit down on the sofa she knelt beside him, and with great tenderness she tried to comfort him, and he grew calmer under her influence.

"Vic," he said, "I have lost all belief in

human nature. I fancied Kitty perfect, and I find she is nothing but a heartless flirt! She has ruined my life; I shall in future take no interest in my work or anything else!"

"Yes, you will, by-and-by, Lance," said Vic, gently. "You are still young, dear, and you will find as years go on there are other things to live for. We each have our special duty to do, Lance, and you must rise above your sorrow and do it manfully. You will probably never forget Miss Hartland, but in time I hope you will cease to regret her; for, dear, if she could be so faithless to you, you are better without her."

"Vic, how can you speak in such a matter-of-fact manner? You can never have really loved, child, or you would not talk so lightly about getting over my affection for Kitty."

"Lance," she said, earnestly, "it would be impossible for you to care for Miss Hartland more than I do for my lost friend. I know you are miserable, and so am I. In fact, I long to die, and thus forget; but I am young, and strong too, and I know I have my life's duty before me, and with Heaven's help I mean to do it. Trouble must not make us selfish, dear boy. We must both rouse ourselves for the sake of others. Will you try, Lance?"

"Yes, little Vic! I will try, to please you. You are a perfect angel, dear, and have made me feel like a man once more! I will not think all the world bad for the fault of one."

"That is well, dear!" she replied, affectionately. "Gold has to be purified by fire, and the heart by sorrow. Trouble is sent to us in love, and if we will only receive it in the right way it must ennoble our natures."

"You are a good girl, Vic," said Lancelot Silvester, softly, "and you have been the saving of me. If I had not had you to lead me to the right path I should have become utterly reckless."

"Nonsense!" said Vic, smiling; "and now pull yourself together, dear, for there goes the breakfast-bell, and they will be coming down. No long faces, mind, or I shall be asked what is the matter with you. Let us try which of us can make ourselves the most agreeable during breakfast. You can't! Of course you can; the worse you feel the more you must talk, unless you wish to be catechized, which would not be quite pleasant for you."

"No, indeed, dear, I should be sorry if any one discovered my secret now. It is humiliating enough to feel that my love has been returned to me, not wanted; but it would make it far worse for me to hear if other people knew it."

"No doubt it would," replied Vic, "and to prevent anyone noticing things have gone wrong with you, you must appear your own cheerful self. I know it is difficult, but as you are to leave us to-morrow you will not have to keep up the farce for long, whereas I shall have to endure it to the end," and she rose from her knees, and left his side that he might not see the tears which had gathered in her eyes.

Then Miss Lawrence joined them, and soon afterwards Marion and Felix Emmerson entered the room, with their faces all aglow from the brisk walk they had had in the morning air.

Before the end of the day Felix Emmerson took his leave, promising to write and tell Marion what success he had with his father; and the next morning his letter arrived, but it brought little good news, for Sir Raphael had plainly told him at his death he would be penniless; and although he raised no objections to Marion Silvester personally, and consented to receive her as his son's future wife, still he pointed out to him how impossible it would be for them to marry until Felix had made a home and a fortune of his own.

And Felix, knowing of no opening for him in England, determined to emigrate to Canada, and learn farming with some friends of his who had settled there, hoping to return home in a year's time, and buy a small estate with the little money he possessed (which had been left to him by his maternal grandfather) and settle down, and see to the management of it himself.

So it was arranged, and a month later all was

ready for his departure, and he came to Bracondale to say good-bye.

And when he was gone Marion returned to her quiet life, pale and pathetic looking; yet she was not entirely unhappy, for she knew her lover was working for her, and she felt he would be true.

And Vic would always put her own trouble aside, and try to cheer her cousin, assuring her that better times would come; but she often felt lonely and restless herself, and longed for some one to comfort and support her.

And thus sorrow reigned where, but a few weeks before, all had seemed so bright and gay!

CHAPTER VII.

A BAD CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTMAS-TIDE came round, and Lancelot Silvester returned once more for a few days' holiday. But it was to be a sad season to all at Bracondale, for Miss Lawrence had taken a severe chill while visiting some cottagers, and after a few days' illness she passed away, being unable to survive a bad attack of congestion of the lungs. And her last words were full of love to the three who had nursed her with such unremitting attention; and then, with her hand clasped in Vic's, and a peaceful smile upon her lips, she entered into her eternal rest.

A week later the earthly remains of Miss Lawrence were conveyed to the little village church, about half-a-mile from Bracondale, and the whole distance the road was bordered on either side by those who loved and deeply mourned her.

The churchyard was crowded too, not by an expectant throng who had merely come together from the want of melancholy excitement, and who would go away as soon as the ceremony was over, speak of the beauty of the flowers, or the magnificence of the coffin, and after having exhausted their topic would return to their work without another thought of the one who had passed from their midst; but it was filled with those who were anxious to pay their last tribute of respect to their kind benefactress. And when her coffin was lowered into the grave there was not a dry eye among them.

Vic and Marion did not go to the funeral, feeling such painful scenes were not fit for women to witness; so they remained quietly at home, and read the sad, though beautiful service for the burial of the dead.

And on the return of their guests the will was read, and, with the exception of a few legacies, it was found that the whole of Miss Lawrence's property was left to Victoria Barrington, making her the possessor of fifty thousand pounds and the Bracondale estate. But little Vic felt no joy when she heard of her good fortune; for she had really loved her aunt, and she knew her life would be still darker without the dear old lady to comfort and cheer her.

So there was no flush of pleasure to be seen on her pale face, no sparkle in her usually bright eye; she simply took it as a matter of course, and her only feeling was one of deep regret that her kind relation had been taken from her.

And when their friends bade her good-bye, she failed to see the look of increased interest that many cast upon her, nor did she notice the lingering hand-clasp of those who longed to gain her favour.

The following morning, Marion Silvester received a letter from Felix Emmerson, telling her he had been seriously ill, and the doctors had ordered him home without delay. Therefore, he should leave Canada as soon as possible, and would arrive in England very shortly after his letter, and he promised to come and see her as soon as he landed, even before he went to his father's house.

Poor Marion was terribly upset at this news, for not only did it tell her of her lover's illness, but she knew it must put a stop to all chance of their settling for an indefinite period; and sitting down in an easy chair she wept as if her heart would break.

And thus Vic found her some time afterwards, and seeing she was thoroughly worn out, she persuaded her to go to bed for the remainder of the day; and after having banked up her fire, and made her comfortable, she darkened the room, and left her to take her much-needed rest; and going downstairs she despatched the footman with a telegram to Mr. Sharpe, their solicitor, begging him to come down to her that afternoon.

When he arrived, she insisted on his arranging a deed of gift of twenty-five thousand pounds for Marion Silvester; and after it was duly signed and witnessed she ran with light steps to Marion's chamber, and told her what she had settled for her, and that she hoped as soon as Felix came back that they would look for a pretty little nest and marry at once, as they had now nothing left to wait for.

Marion was quite overjoyed at this unexpected generosity on Vic's part, and quickly recovered her health and spirits; and when Felix Emerson returned a week later, he received a bright and loving welcome from his fiancée, and it was soon decided that their wedding should be early in the spring; and after a few days' stay at Bracondale he went to pay a visit to his father, and look for a suitable residence for himself and Marion.

A week after, when Vic was standing by her aunt's grave, a young servant-maid ran up to her in great distress, and told her her mistress had fainted, and she could not bring her round, and Vic accompanied her to where the girl was lying in a senseless heap upon the ground, and after inquiring about her for a few minutes she learnt it was Nora Mackenzie, and that she had lately lost her father, and the shock had been too much for her, and that she was now alone in the world. And Vic's kind heart was touched by the sad story, and she sent for a fly from some stables near and drove her straight to Bracondale, and sent for Dr. Hammond, who said it was the beginning of a severe attack of brain fever, and advised Vic to send her home without delay; but Vic, knowing her history, determined to keep her at Bracondale, and she telegraphed for a trained nurse to wait on her at night, while she and Marion attended to her by day, and for a long time she lingered between life and death, and in her delirium she called incessantly for Philip Murray, and she seemed so distressed about him that the doctor said if she did not see him she would die, as nothing else would save her. And Vic nobly set her own feelings aside, and said she would send for him, for Nora's sake, and she begged her cousin Lancelot Silvester to inquire as to his whereabouts as soon as possible.

He quickly learnt that Philip Murray had disappeared to get away from his creditors, who refused to wait any longer for their money; and Vic, remembering Dr. Hammond's words, determined to send for him still, so she persuaded Lancelot to find out the exact amount he owed to everyone, and then she paid his debts, and made him free to return to England; and having insisted on Mrs. Murray giving up her son's address, Lancelot Silvester telegraphed to Philip to come at once to Bracondale, also saying that Nora was dying, and that his money affairs were all settled.

Vic thanked him in her own sweet way, and then confessed to him how greatly she had loved Philip; but he had proved he was unworthy of her affection, and that she no longer cared for him; and Lancelot gave her a warm kiss, and after a few loving words, left her to return to his work in London.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NOBLE FORGIVENESS.

WHEN Philip Murray received Lancelot Silvester's telegram his astonishment knew no bounds. His first idea was that someone had played a trick upon him; but on reflection he remembered that no one knew his address but his mother and sister, and he felt sure neither of them would give it up without a good reason. So he packed his portmanteau quickly, and

hastened down to the steamer which would take him to Gravesend in a few hours.

For the last month he had been hiding in Boulogne, and had intended to proceed from there to New Guinea, where he had some friends, as soon as a suitable opportunity offered itself; and he was living upon what Mrs. Murray could spare him out of her income, which was anything but large, and although she did all she was able to do for him, he felt it was not in her power to pay his debts.

He asked himself again and again who could have been so generous towards him? And each time the question puzzled him more and more; for as far as he knew he had not a friend in the world, and Nora being at Bracondale was the greatest wonder of all to him.

He knew that her father was dead, for he had seen it announced in the paper, and he had written a letter of condolence to Nora; but he had expected no answer, as he had not told her where he was staying, feeling sure she would not write to him if she knew his address.

(Continued on page 209.)

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER IV.

A MONTH passed away, and still Godfrey Somerville lingered at the Hall. One day he disappeared soon after breakfast, and did not return till dinner-time, when he looked so utterly jaded and tired out that the whole family were quite concerned about him. Instead of being flattered by their attentions, he answered their inquiries as shortly as he could, and shrouded himself for the rest of the evening in impenetrable silence. Even Nella's sympathies were somewhat aroused by his excessive paleness; but she took care not to express them either by word or look, being anxious to maintain the defensive demeanour which seemed to suit their relations best. She was hungering for news of Cyril, but was obliged to be content with four sheets of closely-written paper, full of wise advice and prudent exhortations, with which his mother thought it her duty to regale her once a fortnight. There was a postscript to the last letter, which, although it only consisted of a few lines, was worth more to the anxious heart of the girl who read it, than all the rest of the correspondence put together.

"P.S.—Cyril has gone to stay with some friends of his in Blankshire, so perhaps you may meet; if you do, impress upon him the necessity of wearing a cabbage leaf in his hat to avoid sunstroke."

She looked up from the letter which lay in her lap with a gleam of joy in her soft brown eyes. To think he was in the same county was happiness sufficient, even if chance willed it so that they never met.

Godfrey Somerville was talking to his cousin over the last remnants of his late breakfast, his aunt and uncle having retired long before on pretext of household or other duties.

"Of course we can picnic there, if you like, but it is a tremendously long way off, and I, for one, decline to do it except on horseback."

Meta looked doubtfully across the table.

"But Miss Maynard cannot ride!"

"Then it is high time she learnt; Limerick is as quiet as a lamb; you can ride Turtle, and I, Pearl."

The great Panjandrum having spoken, it was taken for granted that Miss Maynard would consent, and Meta ran upstairs to see if a certain habit, in a long-closed drawer, could not be induced to fit her.

At twelve o'clock the horses came round, and with a beating heart Nella was raised into the saddle most awkwardly by Godfrey Somerville. Ever since her babyhood she had longed to ride; but she could not help being exceedingly nervous as they trotted down the drive, and she found that she was to receive neither instruction nor

encouragement from the man who had insisted on placing her on Limerick's back.

"You had better ride by Miss Maynard's side," said Meta, kindly; "I look upon her as your charge to-day."

"Deeply honoured; but I think Peter (the old groom) will be of more use than I can. He taught you to ride, and you sit a horse to perfection!"

A blush rose over the plain, freckled face; praise from Godfrey was sweeter than honey in her mouth, and she forgot everything else in the first rush of joy.

Indignant at being thrown over like this, when Mr. Somerville had engaged to take care of her if she would venture to ride, Nella dropped behind, and placed herself under Peter's wing.

The faithful old servant was only "too proud" to give her any instruction he could, and whilst he was explaining to her the beauty of a light hand, the necessity of sitting square in the saddle, and the rest of it, he told her of his bright young mistress who had flown like a bird over gate and hedge, and never failed to be near the hounds, however sharp the run, and however few were in at the finish.

"Bless her kind heart, there never was a purtier sight in the world than Little Missie on the back o' Pearl; I believe the very hounds knew when she was there, and followed all the truer because she came after them so close."

"What did she die of; I never heard!"

"It was all along of the hunting, miss. My lady said she should not go, but Miss Lina was main fond of sport, and Mr. Godfrey backed her up in everything through thick and thin. The end of it was that they brought her home one fine mornin' on a hurdle. It took four of us to carry her, for it was right out there by the Bushes, and the road was very difficult. We laid her on the big table in the hall, being the first place we come to, and Mr. Godfrey come up and took her by the hand. 'Lina,' he says, quite daff-like, 'we ought to have gone together; but you've left me behind.' Then he kissed her as if he would have ate her, and gave a loud screech, and fell flat on the floor."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Nella, dislike for the moment being merged in sympathy.

"Ah, poor fellow! She would have been the making of him—not a doubt of it. He was partial to the very earth she trod on; and now she's in the grave, and he enjoying of himself with her sister. This earth be a very rum place to live in."

"If we did not find some consolation for ourselves, we couldn't live in it."

"You are right, miss. Only I'm an old-fashioned body, and it turns me cold like to see such goin's on."

"Pull yourself together, Miss Maynard," Somerville called out over his shoulder. "We are going to canter over this bit of grass."

Nella's heart fluttered, but she set her teeth, and prepared to enjoy herself if she died before it was over. Fortunately for her, Limerick justified his reputation of being like a lamb, and she reached the road without any mishap except the loss of a few hairpins. Meta laughed at her untidy hair, but complimented her on her seat.

Godfrey said nothing, but lighted a fresh cigarette.

The hedges were full of blossom, and hung out streamers of wild roses or honeysuckle to greet them as they passed; the sky was without a cloud, the air as soft as a baby's breath. It was a day to make all nature join in one pervading hymn of praise—it was a day to make the prisoner's heart burst to think he was not free to go out into the sunshine.

"What an infernal nuisance!" exclaimed Godfrey; "somebody has come here before us."

An empty waggonette followed by a dog-cart came out of the old grey stone gateway of the Castle just before the party from Somerville Hall turned in.

"The place is quite large enough to hold us both," said Meta, soothingly. "We need not see anything of them, unless we like."

"It spoils the whole thing—just our luck," frowning hard. "If there's one thing I hate

more than another, it is being stared at by a lot of idiotic tourists."

"But why are they likely to be more idiotic than we are?" inquired Nella, for the sake of aggravation.

"If you don't know, you can find out. No doubt they will be charmed to have you."

"I am not in the habit of forcing myself on strangers."

"Humph! we were all strangers to you a month ago."

"You were. But I came by invitation."

"The invitation of some—I was not consulted."

"Naturally, as you don't form part of the household."

"I don't know so much about that. Meta, don't I form part and parcel of Somerville?"

"Certainly, and I hope you always may," turning to him with shining eyes.

"I have your good word, little woman, anyhow."

"Yes! and you always will."

"Under any circumstances!" bending forward so as to look into her face.

"Be the circumstances what they may," with touching earnestness.

"There's a friend for you!" and he turned to Nella. "Such a one as can only be found once in a lifetime."

"More than a friend—a cousin."

"What has that got to do with it!" impatiently.

"Only the cousinship evidently led to the friendship."

"And if it did, is it less true because of it?"

"Not less true, perhaps, but less unexpected. I have taken this road because it leads to the Castle; I may be pleased, but I shan't be surprised if I get there."

"You will be surprised when you get there. Did you see whose carriage that was which passed us just now?"

"No! I don't know anyone about here."

"Oh! I thought you must have heard of the Arkwrights."

"Arkwrights? No. How should I?"

"You might through a mutual friend. Meta, I am awfully hungry. I hope the pony-cart hasn't lost its way with the provisions."

"No! there it is. I knew Jemmy would never fail us."

"I am glad to find he hasn't. Before we do anything else, let us dismount and feed."

The luncheon basket was produced and its contents spread out on a snowy cloth under the drooping branches of a weeping willow.

The tree stood on the side of a slope to the right of the ruined castle, whose battlements crowned with ivy formed the foreground to a lovely picture.

Nella had never seen anything like it in her life, and sat with parted lips gazing on the rich undulating woodlands, the glistening waters of the rushing river, the old grey-turreted building, where men had lived and enjoyed the fulness of life in the bygone centuries, and the crumbling wall which had once fenced their pride from the eye of the world.

The men, the women, and the children, were dead and forgotten, but the place where they had dwelt lived after them in undying beauty, telling, though with silent lips, of the splendour and the glory of the past.

"Another glass of champagne, Miss Maynard!"

Godfrey's unmelodious voice roused her from a pleasant reverie, and she answered hastily,—

"No more, thank you."

He stooped and quietly filled up her glass as if she hadn't heard.

"I said I did not want it."

"But you will when you hear my toast. Long life and happiness to Cyril Vere and his lovely bride. Drink it, or I shall think you are jealous."

"Jealous!"

"Take care. How your hand shakes! Is it emotion?"

"After riding for the first time in my life it is rather natural."

"True! I had forgotten. You must honour this toast, Meta, as well as Miss Maynard."

"But who is Mr. Vere?"

"Don't you remember him, a yellow-haired Adonis, who is about to fill his empty pockets out of the handy money-bags of an heiress?"

"He is not the man to sell himself," said Nella, bravely, though her cheeks were white.

"If he is going to marry her, he must be fond of her."

"Ah! you are behind the scenes!" leaning forward with an air of interest. "From your own experience, judging by what he did and said, and looked during that last week you spent together, when, no doubt, he opened his heart to you, his dear little cousin. By Jove! she's going to faint!" breaking off in pretended alarm.

"I am only tired—this will revive me," and she drank off her champagne, independently of the toast.

"Come for a little stroll, that will stretch your legs, and do you more good than anything. Meta, I'll come back and fetch you," he called out, just as she was about to follow.

Wondering what could be his motives for wishing to be alone with her, Nella walked by his side in silence. The path was very steep, and every now and then he stretched out his hand to help her, as if really sorry for her fatigue. She did not touch his hand, but she was surprised that he remembered to offer it, as he was usually averse to paying her the smallest attention.

The voices of the so-called "idiotic tourists" could be heard through the wood, but they managed to avoid them by keeping to the left.

With a sigh Nella leaned up against a tree, feeling as if all her strength had departed. Godfrey left her where she was standing, and climbed out of sight. Presently he came back.

"You must come," he said, eagerly, "the view is splendid!"

She shook her head.

"I am too tired!"

"It is only a few steps further on!" in a rapid whisper. "You will regret it all your life if you don't come!"

"Why—why do you talk so low?"

"Because there are people about, and I don't want to bring them down upon us! Make no noise, but come!"

There was something so urgent in his manner that she yielded, and motioned to him to go on first, she picked up the skirt of her habit and followed as best she could.

He pulled aside the branches, and putting his finger to his lips, motioned to her to come forward.

With a curious feeling of expectation, she put her head carefully through the opening in the briars, and started back.

There, close in front of her, but on a lower ledge which overhung the valley, was Cyril Vere, looking down with admiration and pity on the beautiful face of a fashionably-dressed woman, which was upturned to his in frankest confidence.

"I owe you everything!" she murmured, softly.

He stooped his head with a graceful courtesy peculiarly his own, and raising her hand to his lips said, with a smile,—

"I am more than paid!"

CHAPTER V.

Sick at heart, Nella stumbled back amongst the thorns. Tearing her skirt on the briars, she hurried down the path with an uncertain, blundering gait, as if she were blindfold, Godfrey following her with an evil smile upon his lips.

"Why did you not speak to him? I thought he was a friend of yours!"

"Because," she said, trying to battle with her bitter pain,— "because he was so well occupied!"

"He's a lucky fellow! Wish I had had his chance!"

"Oh, dear! Miss Somerville, let us go home," said Nella, piteously, when they reached the place where they had left her. "I am so tired that I can scarcely stand."

"Miss Maynard has seen a *tableau vivant* in the wood, and it has been too much for her."

"She looks as if she had seen a ghost! What have you done to her?"

"I! Nothing! Come for a stroll, Meta. If we find Miss Maynard's friend we will tell him she is waiting for him."

"Tell him what you like!" she said, coldly. "I should like to have an opportunity of congratulating him!"

But when their backs were turned she stole into the deepest recesses of the wood, and all necessity for concealment having vanished with their inquisitive eyes, flung herself down on the mossy ground, and cried aloud in her agony.

To see him standing but a few yards from her, in all the pride of his manly beauty and vigour—to see that the glances of his kindly blue eye, the kisses of his audacious lips, the wishes and the tenderness of his honest heart, were all for another!

To think that she should stand by unnoticed whilst Cyril Vere, her playfellow, friend, and cousin, devoted all his attention to someone else!

She had not prized them half enough when they were her own undisputed property, but now that they were claimed by another, she felt that the world was scarcely big enough to contain her vain regret.

"Heaven help me!" she sighed, putting her ruffled hair back from her face. "I was lonely enough before, and now I am utterly friendless. He might have told me something of it, and not kept me in the dark. We were always such friends—never meaning anything by our stupid quarrels—never meaning anything but to make it up as soon as we could. And now—now—he won't care if I am cross or not; he won't look for me when he strolls out to have a smoke in the garden. He won't think of me when he pulls out his cigar-case, because she is sure to give him a much better one. He won't—he won't do anything that he used to do in the dear old times."

Tears trickled down her cheeks, as she laid her head on a cushion of moss. Tired out by her long ride, and overcome by the emotion she had suffered since, she fell asleep, and forgot her sorrows in dreams of utterly unattainable joy.

Godfrey Somerville roamed about the ruins, trying to content himself with the simple adoration of his cousin; but although he told himself that he hated her, his thoughts roamed perpetually to the girl whose heart had been like an open book to him that summer's afternoon. He wondered if she would throw down her tiny little mask when his back was turned, and cry her eyes out when there was no one there to see.

Meta found him silent and preoccupied, but it was happiness enough for her to walk by his side, to listen to his stray remarks, or even to watch his yawns.

In her simple heart Godfrey was the reigning sovereign, and, like the Royalists of old, she thought the king could do no wrong. She claimed nothing from him in return, and found an all-sufficing reward in his somewhat patronising affection.

Whilst they were wandering about from one delightful view to another Nella slept on, unconscious of everything, with a smile on her pretty lips, two dewdrops on her lashes—unconscious even when Cyril Vere came striding through the undergrowth, looking to right and left with eager glances, till he stopped short with a suppressed exclamation of delight, and a gleam of joy in his eyes. There at his feet she lay, looking as innocent in her pure, unsullied beauty as if she had dropped down like a snowflake from the clouds.

A great wave of tenderness swept over his heart, involuntarily he stretched out his arms.

"Mr. Vere! Mr. Vere!" came in imperative accents from the level lawn where the carriages were drawn up at the edge of the wood, followed by a deep voice, "Come along, old fellow, are you going to keep us waiting all day?"

He hesitated. A look of infinite longing came into his eyes.

"Self denial is the pauper's duty!" he mur-

mured, bitterly, as he bent down and took a faded rosebud from the front of her dress.

Her bosom heaved with a deep sigh; her lips parted.

"My darling!" he said, softly; "would to Heaven you were mine!" and, afraid to trust his self-control any longer, he stooped his head to avoid a branch, and hurried back again to those who were waiting for him.

The moment he was gone she awoke, and catching sight of his figure disappearing amongst the branches, started to her feet.

"Cyril! Cyril!" she cried, breathlessly; but he did not hear her—the sound of carriage wheels, muffled by the grass, told her that she was too late as she sprang forward in a vain endeavour to stop him.

"Did you call me?" said the mocking voice of Somerville, as he placed himself in front of her. "My name is Godfrey, which, perhaps, you have forgotten!"

"Mr. Vere was here just now, and there was something I wanted to tell him."

"Ah! I saw him, but thought him too well occupied to interrupt."

"Oh! if you saw him, in common charity you might have woken me. I would have given anything on earth to have been awake for five minutes!"

"Even a pair of gloves, which I took for granted he would win."

"Mr. Vere is a gentleman!" throwing back her small head and flushing crimson.

"Certainly; if he had been a lady the sport would have been small. There would be no temptation, and therefore no risk."

"In any case, there could be no risk with him."

"Perhaps not for you, now that Miss Arkwright has come to the fore. And yet I thought you had a rosebud when I last saw you."

She looked down in surprise to find it had gone.

"I suppose I dropped it."

"I suppose he stole it; the risk was greater than I thought," looking at her with a sidelong, penetrating glance from under his heavy lashes.

A blush rose slowly over the whiteness of her neck to cheek and brow. If he stole it he cared to have it, and she was not quite forgotten after all. A delicious smile hovered about her mouth, and a scrap of comfort crept into her heart.

The sight of that smile angered Somerville strangely.

Drawing a flower out of his coat he held it up.

"This dropped from Miss Arkwright's hand as Vere helped her into the carriage. Is it all like your rose?"

Nella looked at it with dilated eyes.

"It is my rose—I know it by the shade on the leaf!"

"You ought to be flattered that he should think it good enough for Miss Arkwright."

"Of course I am," in bitter scorn.

"But it was cool of him to take it from you. If I had stolen it I should have kept it. Whenever you do give me a flower," watching with cool enjoyment the disappointed quivering of her lips, "I won't pass it on—that I promise you."

"Make your mind easy—you won't have the chance."

"It will be time to refuse it when I ask for it. Don't you think you can wait till then?"

"I should think Miss Somerville was tired of waiting for us. Let us go."

"Am I not the best judge of that? I have only to consult my own wishes, and then I know here."

"It is shameful of you to trifle with her as you do!"

"My good girl, you don't know what you are talking about. If I did not 'trifle' with her she would collapse and die. There she is," putting aside a branch for Nella to pass. "Her first glance for me—her second for you, see if I'm not right."

He was right; but she would not own it as she hurried forward to make her apologies.

Meta received them with a placid smile,

assuring her that they were just in time to get home by the half-past seven o'clock dinner.

Nella stood beside her horse, looking up at him helplessly.

Godfrey helped Meta on to horse-taking care to be as long about the operation as possible—and then came forward slowly as if he did not relish the office when it had to be performed for her companion.

Instantly resolving that she would have nothing to do with him, Nella asked Peter in a low voice to bring Limerick up to some old stone steps at the entrance to the stable.

"Hullo! where are you off to?" Godfrey exclaimed, in surprise.

Nella vouchsafed him no answer, but presently rode back in triumph, having scrambled into the saddle unaided.

Finding that his services were not needed, he came up to arrange her habit, and told her that if she would ride on in front with him he would see that no harm came to her.

"Thank you; I depended on Peter before, so I will do so again."

"Then if you come to grief don't blame me," as he put his foot into the stirrup and threw his leg across Pearl's back.

"Let go her head, you idiot!" to Jemmy, the stable-boy, with a muttered oath.

"I will not blame you for good fortune or bad. I should be sorry to think that either depended on you."

"And yet it may—unlikelier things have happened before now."

"I don't understand you."

"And it is not for me to explain."

As they emerged on to a pleasant stretch of grass-land he suggested to Meta that the horses would be all the better for a good gallop.

"It would be very delightful," she said, eagerly; "but not quite safe," she added, regretfully, "for Miss Maynard."

"She has chosen her companion; let her have him all to herself. They can follow us at their own pace."

Having explained their intentions to those behind, they set off at a rapid canter, which soon improved into a gallop. Nella had the greatest difficulty, even with Peter's assistance, in preventing Limerick from following their example; but when he had settled down into a steady trot, she enjoyed the quiet ride home through the lengthening shadows.

The peacefulness of the summer's evening seemed to still the throbbing of her heart, and at a safe distance from the continual annoyance of Godfrey Somerville's presence she had time to collect her thoughts and brace her nerves for whatever might happen next.

If Cyril were really going to be married she would be sure to hear the news in her aunt's next letter. If the girl were an heiress there would probably be no cause for delay, as the insuperable barrier of poverty would be swept away.

All that was left to her was to hope and pray that this stranger, with the beautiful, sorrow-struck face, might bring the blessing of a lasting happiness to his home—that she might look after his comfort, guard his honour, uphold his authority, and be to him all that a model wife should be. And then her eye fell upon the watch-chain dangling from one of the button-holes of her habit, and she knew that, try as she might, she could never pray that any woman should be the same to him as she had been all these years—and might be still if—if she had not been the greatest fool that the world ever held.

When she went to bed that night she put his watch chain under her pillow, and felt that, so long as she possessed these precious golden links, their two lives were bound together by the sweet irrefragable tie that outlasts legal bonds and ties of blood—the sweet and tender association of the past.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next week, when Eleanor Maynard came down one morning to breakfast she saw a letter in Aunt Mary's neat handwriting lying on the

table. She caught it up eagerly, longing to know the worst. Her colour came and went as she broke it open, and her cheeks were quite pale with anxiety before she got to the end of it; but there was nothing in it of any particular interest—nothing on a higher level than dreary details of the poor parishioners. With a sigh, as once of relief and disappointment, she put it down, and addressed herself to her breakfast. As she raised the cup of coffee to her lips she noticed for the first time that there was a vacant chair opposite to her.

"Mr. Somerville not down yet? I thought I was the latest of all."

"And so you are," said Miss Somerville, with a smile. "Godfrey breakfasted long ago, and went up to town by the 9.15 train."

"Dear me, isn't it very sudden! It was only last night that he proposed that we should go out for another ride!"

"And he hadn't forgotten it this morning. He won't be able to start with us, but Peter is to lead his horse, and we are to meet him at Alverley. If by any chance he should miss the 3.40, he would come by the other line, and we should have to ride on to Coppinstone, which would be double the distance, and make us very late!"

"Then we must pin our hopes on his punctuality."

"A poor look-out, for Godfrey was never punctual in his life," said Sir Edward, with a sigh.

"Now, papa, don't be so unjust! He only missed the train once the whole month that he stayed with us in the winter!"

"Because I was always 'at' him to be off. But I mustn't prejudice Miss Maynard against him."

"Pray don't, because she doesn't like him too much as I do!"

"Nob too much! We don't want that!" with a grave smile; "but just enough, I hope!"

"As much as Mr. Somerville likes me!" said Nella, promptly.

"Then that must be quite sufficient! Don't let Limerick go far to-day, for I took him a good distance myself yesterday; and I fancied he wasn't the thing." So saying he rose from the table, with the newspaper in his hand. "I cannot think what I have done with the list of horses that Tattersall sent me yesterday!"

Meta jumped up to help her father to look for them; and Lady Somerville asked Nella to come into the boudoir, and see if a favourite inkstand could be mended.

Punctually at three o'clock the horses were brought round, and the girls mounted ignominiously from a chair.

There was no sunshine, but the heat was stifling; and Nella declared that she should like to take a fan with her as the Empress of Austria did.

"You would drop it, for a certainty, directly Limerick went out of a walk."

"I suppose I should; but it would be very nice to get a breath of air from anything."

"The clouds seem absolutely stationary; but I have often seen them as black as this, and yet we've had no storm!" and Meta looked up at the heavens, with a critical eye, although she intended to meet Godfrey Somerville, whatever the hour or the weather.

They reached Alverley in very good time, but when the train came up, and disgorged its small complement of passengers, Somerville was not amongst them.

"How very tiresome!" exclaimed Meta, her face showing her disappointment, as plainly as if it had been written there in large letters. "After what papa said about Limerick I don't take him on to Coppinstone; but it will be a horrid bore to turn back and send Peter on without us!"

"You shan't do that. I'll go home by myself!"

"But won't you be afraid! Supposing Limerick began to kick!"

"But he never does, so why should he begin to-day! I shall go along very quietly, attempting nothing beyond a trot. And if I should come to grief, you needn't send Peter to pick up



"MY DARLING!" SAID CYRIL VERA TO HIMSELF, SOFTLY, "WOULD TO HEAVEN YOU WERE MINE!"

the pieces. There would be nobody to care if the right pattern were kept."

"Nonsense! As if I shouldn't! I don't think I ought to let you go"—duty and inclination pulling different ways.

"You don't let me, but I insist upon having my own way. Ta-ta! Mr. Somerville will be delighted to have you to himself." With a little nod she rode slowly down the road, and presently disappeared round the corner.

Inwardly she was extremely nervous, and every time that Limerick shook his head to disturb a fly she thought he was going to run away; but after some time, as he seemed to be as much oppressed by the heaviness of the atmosphere as she was herself, her fears decreased, and her thoughts became less intently riveted on the management of her horse.

How she wished that Cyril could see her, riding all alone on one of Sir Edward's thoroughbreds, as if she had been the most perfect horsewoman in the world! If she reached home in safety she would never be afraid again; the next winter, if Meta would only consent to accompany her, perhaps she would be able to follow the hounds.

She was so engrossed with her daring projects that she failed to notice the approach of a traction-engine till it was almost close upon her. The huge, ungainly monster came slowly towards her, rumbling, squeaking, and puffing forth volumes of steam. Limerick stopped dead short, shaking all over like a frightened child. Terrified out of her wits, Nella tugged at the reins, but without the smallest effect. Limerick lay back his ears, and put down his head, as if preparing for a plunge.

Nella, in her terror, never saw that they had stopped the engine, and that one of the men was advancing towards her with the benevolent intention of leading the horse past it; she heard a loud puff, as the steam was let off, and thought that the whole ponderous machine, like a very car of Juggernaut, was coming upon her to crush her to atoms.

In desperation she hit the horse smartly with her whip, thinking that anything was better than sitting quietly there to be smashed. In an instant Limerick threw up his head, caught the bit between his teeth, and bolted. Down a road, at right angles to the one in which they had left the machine, he went at a mad gallop, whilst Nella, with a face white as death, clung on to the pommel with her knees, trying to remember the old groom's instructions even in the midst of her peril.

The labourers looked after the runaway in some perturbation, shook their heads, and went back again to the engine, remembering that they were due at Mr. Wilson's farm by half-past five, and knowing that they could do "no mortal good to the poor gurl by speerin' arter her when she wern't in sight."

On, past flying haystacks and hedges, past little dogs, which yelped and barked as if they enjoyed the sport, past an old church and silent churchyard, past gardens where the roses were hanging in crimson clusters, past empty cottages, whose inmates seemed to be fast asleep—on, with the fear of death always staring in her face—on, with the love of life growing deeper and more strong with every moment that brought her nearer to its end!

To increase the horror of her position the storm, which had been threatening all day, broke overhead in an awe-striking growl, and, just as Limerick was beginning to recover the shock to his nerves, a flash of lightning darted across the road with a blinding glare. Shying violently, in a way that nearly unseated his rider, he leapt forward with increased velocity.

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy!" gasped the poor girl, feeling it impossible to hold on any longer. Strength and courage were failing fast, only the spurious energy of despair lent any power to her stiffened muscles. Her hat had fallen off, and, being attached by a cord to one of the buttons of her body, bobbed about in such a way as to perturb her horse still further; her hair was streaming down her back—every hairpin having

been lost in her wild career—and her very lips were white with fear. Still she clung to her saddle with all the determination of her will, knowing nothing of the course they were pursuing, or of the country they had reached, only praying that at the end she might not be dragged along in a crippled state, but die—simply die—if die she must!

Darker, and still darker grew the sky, the lightning flashed through the dense foliage of ever-green oaks, which met in a sombre arch overhead. Without knowing it she had entered the private grounds of a gentleman's place. She was almost past consciousness of outward objects, when a loud exclamation sounded above the roar of the thunder.

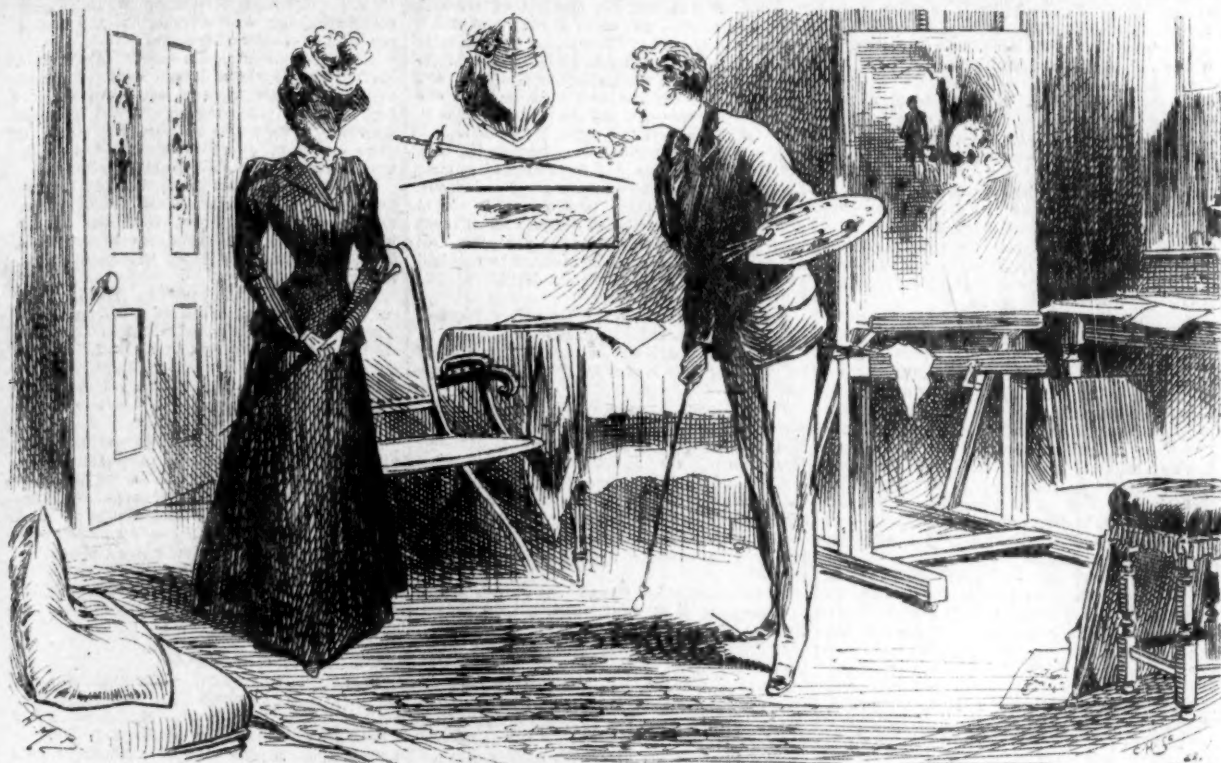
Some one darted forward and caught her bridle-rein—someone called her by her name in a tone of the greatest surprise. The revulsion of feeling was too great—in danger she had behaved with presence of mind—in safety she gave way. Her eyes closed, she reeled in her saddle, and slipped down into the outstretched arms of Godfrey Somerville.

As her face touched his, and her bright hair fell in a shower of gold over his shoulder, his lips quivered. An expression of dismay and perplexity swept across his features, as he muttered beneath his breath,—

"What on earth brought her here!"

(To be continued.)

A LARGE number of coins have recently been found on Hunmanby Sands, Yorkshire, close to a place known as the Gap. This was a favourite spot for landing or embarking in days when men wished to enter or leave England unobserved. Nearly all the coins so discovered are of a period when the country was disturbed, being of the reigns of Edward II., Elizabeth, James I., Charles I., and William III.



MURIEL FOUND THE ARTIST IN HIS SMALL ROOM, WORKING AT A PICTURE ON AN EASEL.

REDEEMED BY FATE.

CHAPTER IV.

LIKE one who has received a sudden blow, which as yet he only feels in a dazed sort of numbness, Phillip stood perfectly still, repeating to himself Mr. Darley's last words, as if by their iteration he fancied he should comprehend what they meant.

Not Mrs. Maxwell's nephew!—nameless!—penniless! Could this be possible, or was it a lie coined by the solicitor in order to insult and humiliate him?

He knew very little of Mr. Darley. Mrs. Maxwell had spoken of him but rarely, for between her own and her brother's character there was no sympathy whatever, and even the bond of kinship had been insufficient to overcome the repugnance she entertained towards him, consequently no communication had been kept up for many years, and it had never occurred to Phillip to speculate what action Mr. Darley would take in case of his sister's death.

Now that the fact confronted him in such an unlooked-for guise it took him completely at a disadvantage, and he felt like a man groping about in utter darkness.

Presently he felt a touch on his arm, and, looking up, saw Fletcher at his side.

"Don't take any notice of what that man says, Master Phillip—he's as hard and cruel as the grave!" she exclaimed, with a vindictive glance in the direction in which he had disappeared. "Come into my room and rest yourself—he can't disturb you there."

Almost unconsciously the young man allowed her to lead him to a small apartment in the rear of the house, where she drew forward an armchair, and then proceeded to pour out a cup of tea from a pot put down in the fender to keep warm.

"Drink it, Master Phillip—it'll do you good, and you must want it after that long journey, for

I'll warrant you've had neither bit nor sup since you started."

This was true, and much as Phillip had often affected to despise the "old woman's beverage," he drank it now, and felt refreshed, and better able to face his difficulties after it.

"Now tell me, Fletcher," he said, "is there any chance of getting to see my poor aunt?"

The old woman shook her head.

"I'm afraid not, for Mr. Darley has the key of the room, and, more than that, has put his seal on the lock of the door."

"Why didn't you send for me before, so that I might have seen her alive!" exclaimed the young man, reproachfully.

"It wasn't my fault, Mr. Phillip, indeed it wasn't! I'll tell you all about it, and then you'll see I'm not to blame. As you know, my poor mistress has not been quite well for some time, but we none of us dreamt there was anything serious the matter, neither did she herself. On Sunday—the night before last—she had the doctor in, and afterwards asked me to write for you to come home, but told me not to say anything in the letter that might alarm you concerning her state of health. I wrote, and wanted to telegraph, but she wouldn't let me—she said there was no immediate hurry, only she should feel more satisfied if you were with her. But for all that, the doctor must have known there was danger, for as ill-luck would have it, he met Mr. Darley the next morning in the city, and told him, and before noon Mr. Darley was here, insisting on seeing his sister."

"My mistress was much agitated," went on Fletcher, after a little pause devoted to the task of wiping her eyes; "but it seems her brother begged very hard for a reconciliation, and she could hardly refuse to patch up the old quarrel, so he stayed, and was with her all the afternoon. His daughter came too, but did not stay long, because he wouldn't let her; and about four o'clock I was called in to my mistress's room and found her very white and ill—so bad, in fact, that I knew she had not long to live."

"Telegraph for Phillip now," she whispered. "I want to—I must see him before I die."

"And so I lost no time in sending off a message—"

"Which I did not get till just before I started!" groaned Phillip. "You see, the nearest office is several miles away from where I was staying, and they had to send a messenger on foot with the despatch."

"Then the doctor came," continued Fletcher, "and stayed a long time, and after he went away Mr. Darley sent me out of the room, and said he wanted to talk privately to his sister; but before long she rang her bell and told me to go off for the lawyer, and tell him to bring her will with him, and I was to lose no time. Unfortunately, the lawyer was out, and when I came back I found Mrs. Maxwell unconscious. I gave her brandy, and tried all I could to revive her; and once I fancied I heard her mention your name; but although she lingered on through the night, she never quite recovered her senses, and early this morning she died."

There was silence for a few minutes, Phillip bitterly regretting he had not been a few hours earlier, so that he might have said good-bye to his best friend ere she set out on that long journey from whence there is no return.

"Directly she died," said the servant, presently, "Mr. Darley took possession, and at once sealed up all the rooms—except yours and his sister's private study, where he sits himself."

"You witnessed his greeting to me!" said Phillip, abruptly. "You heard all he said; can you tell me what he meant?"

The old woman paused, and did not reply. "Don't hesitate to tell me, whatever it may be!" exclaimed Greville, with impatient earnestness; "recollect, I know nothing whatever of the facts he has stated, and there is no one but you to help me to a solution of the mystery."

"Well, then, Mr. Phillip, I'll give you all the particulars I know; but you must prepare yourself for a surprise, and not an agreeable one

either. What Mr. Darley said is quite true—you are no relation of his or Mrs. Maxwell!"

"Then who am I?" his pallid face growing yet whiter at this confirmation of his fears.

"That I can't tell you; but this is how it came about that Mrs. Maxwell adopted you. Some eighteen years ago, that is directly after she lost her little boy, she was not well, and took apartments in a little village in Wales, called Llantreassan.

"It was a very quiet, out-of-the-way place, up amongst the hills, and with only the cottagers and farmers by way of neighbours, so Mrs. Maxwell was very glad to make the acquaintance of a lady who lived in a little village near, and went by the name of Greville—though I've often fancied it wasn't her right one.

"She was a very pretty woman, but so quiet and reserved that it was rather hard to get on with her; and, indeed, she seemed to shun acquaintances, and it was with great difficulty my mistress got intimate—even then no confidences passed between them. She said her husband was away on the continent, but she did not mention him often, and was as close as close could be over her own affairs. You were five years old at that time, and often used to come to our house—for Mrs. Maxwell had taken a great fancy to you, and liked to have you near her, perhaps because you were about the same age as her own boy would have been had he lived.

"Well, one day she and I went to call on Mrs. Greville, and when we got to the cottage we found her lying senseless on the floor of her little sitting-room, with a newspaper clutched in her hand, and you crying by her side. We were very much alarmed, especially when you, in your baby prattle, told us how your mother had caught you in her arms, crying out,—"Your father's dead, Phillip! dead—dead!"

"Finding all our efforts at reviving her useless, we sent for a doctor, and when he came he declared life to be extinct. It seemed he had known for a long time she had been suffering from heart disease, and he said she must have had some sudden shock that had brought about the end."

She stopped and looked at Phillip, who, with his face hidden by his hand, was recalling the events she mentioned, aided by her description. Memory brought the scene before him as vividly as if it had taken place only yesterday, and he could see it with startling distinctness, although for so many years all recollection of it had been obliterated.

"Go on!" he said, hoarsely.

"Your mother had no friends in the village, as I said before, so Mrs. Maxwell took upon herself the task of seeing to her funeral, and arranging everything. As a matter of fact there was little to arrange, for there were no bills owing, and we found about fifty pounds in the house in ready-money. Mrs. Maxwell thought herself justified in looking through all the papers she could find, but discovered no clue to your relatives, or to the identity of your father—nothing, indeed, except a bundle of letters carefully tied up, addressed to your mother and signed 'Phillip.' My mistress read them, but they did not help her at all. However, she kept them, and then she resolved to adopt you, and so when we went away from Wales we took you with us, and you were taught to call her 'aunt,' all her friends supposing you to be her late husband's nephew. It was through this, principally, that she fell out with her own brother, for he was extremely angry at what he termed her 'foolishness,' and they had a serious quarrel, which ended in Mrs. Maxwell declaring she never wished to see him again, and she never did till yesterday."

"Then," muttered Phillip, in a tone of deepest despondency, "all he said is true, and I have no right in this house. I am penniless, and an impostor."

"Don't say that, Master Phillip; and as for being penniless, I don't think you need be at all afraid, for Mrs. Maxwell never made any secret of her intention to leave you all she had, and last Saturday a lawyer was closeted with her all the afternoon—making her will to the best of my belief."

For some time after Fletcher left off speaking Phillip remained immersed in gloomy meditation, his mind busy with the revelation just made to him. One thing presented itself clearly before him—the necessity for instituting a search, and trying to discover who and what he was, who were his parents—for that they stood alone in the world he did not and would not believe.

A mystery seemed to have surrounded Mrs. Greville in her little Welsh home, and to clear that mystery must now be his great endeavour. The first step towards it would be to obtain possession of the packet of letters, for without these he felt himself practically powerless, and acting on the impulse of the moment he rose and knocked at the door of the room Mr. Darley had taken possession of.

"Come in," answered the lawyer's voice, and he obeyed the invitation and entered.

"Oh! it is you, is it? I can't spare you many minutes, my time is precious," was his gracious salutation.

"I shall not trespass on it long. I simply want to tell you that I have learned from Fletcher the particulars of my adoption by Mrs. Maxwell for the first time," responded Phillip, calmly, and determined to take no notice of the manner of his reception. "It seems Mrs. Maxwell had in her possession some letters belonging to my mother, and it was for the purpose of asking you for these that I came."

"I have not looked through my sister's papers as yet—when I do I will keep the letters for you."

Phillip bowed, and was about retiring, when Mr. Darley called him back.

"Stay a minute; as long as you are here we may as well come to some understanding, and let your position be clearly defined. My sister died without a will, consequently I, who am her next-of-kin, claim everything. You cannot expect me to do anything for you—"

"I neither expect or wish it," interrupted the young man, quietly; "but I thought—I understood—Mrs. Maxwell's solicitor drew up her will last week."

"Draw it up, yes," responded Mr. Darley, with a grim smile, and balancing a ruler on his finger as he spoke, "only, unfortunately for you—fortunately for me—she never signed it, therefore it is so much waste paper, as her lawyer will tell you if you take the trouble to consult him. Under these circumstances you will see the necessity of immediate action. You can stay here until after the funeral, but then you must leave, as I intend letting the house at once. You have had a University education"—this, from the bitter way in which it was uttered, seemed to be a very sore point with the speaker. "You are supposed to be able to paint pictures, so there is nothing hard in your being left to your own resources, and—"

"Thank you, but that is a point I have no wish to discuss with you," put in Phillip, curtly.

"As you will—the matter cannot interest me. However, I was about observing you are at liberty to take all the things my sister gave you in her lifetime—your watch and chain for example"—glancing at the handsome gold Albert the young man wore, and which had been Mrs. Maxwell's last present—"and whatever books belong to you, and the sooner they are out of the house the better I shall be pleased."

"Very well," Phillip said, simply. "Is there any other matter you wish to speak of?"

"No, that is all."

"Then, I will wish you good morning!"

And he went out, while Mr. Darley leaned back in his chair with knitted brows, dimly conscious that this moment to which he had looked forward for so long was hardly the triumph he had expected. Indeed, Phillip's perfect calmness and good breeding had proved an armour that his opponent was powerless to penetrate.

But as soon as Phillip reached his own room all the calmness vanished; his eyes flashed, his chest heaved, and it was some moments before he was able to master his agitation. Then he sat down in front of his desk, and opened it

with the intention of writing to Haldé, and acquainting her with all that had happened in the short time since they parted.

He looked his situation boldly in the face. He had now no one to depend upon, and must therefore at once begin to carve out a future for himself. The inquiry he had purposed making with regard to his parentage would require money, so before commencing it he must work in order to obtain the necessary funds.

Well, he could paint, only he knew pictures were rather difficult to sell sometimes, and art could be on occasion a very capricious mistress indeed; still, he had about twenty pounds in hand, and with this to go on with he would not starve yet awhile.

To attempt to approach Mr. Darrell as a suitor for his daughter's hand would be at the present moment the very height of absurdity. He would be sent ignominiously away without doubt—he who had nothing to offer besides his love; while to bind Haldé to a secret engagement would be dishonourable, and a wrong to the girl herself.

No, the only thing he could do was to give her up. So he wrote a long letter, explaining everything to her, and ended by bidding her farewell—a farewell that hope whispered, might not, after all, be for ever—for if he succeeded in his profession, and she would only be true, the future might, perhaps, require him for the bitterness of the present—only the future was so far off, and the present so near and so bitter!

CHAPTER V.

In the luxuriously-furnished room of a house in South Kensington sat Mr. Darley, about a week after his sister's death. He had the *Times* newspaper in his hand, a bottle of '68 port at his elbow, and a general air of comfortable well-being pervading his person. Those of his clients who had only seen him in his office would hardly have recognised him, for Joseph Darley at home and Joseph Darley in business were two very different people; and his daughter Muriel had no idea that her suave, indulgent parent, who gratified her whims, and submitted to her caprices, had acquired for himself the reputation of the hardest-headed and closest-fisted lawyer within a very extended radius.

People said strange things of Mr. Darley—whether true or not, is a moot question. It was, however, a well-known fact that to his legitimate practice of the law he added money-lending, and many were the stories told of the rate of interest he exacted, and the ruin he brought on those unfortunate victims who were helpless enough to fall into his clutches. Of these, and sundry other shady proceedings, Muriel Darley knew nothing; in point of fact, she had only just returned from a continental school, and to her, her father was invariably courteous and affectionate; so that, although she sometimes fancied she caught a glimpse of the cloven foot beneath the velvet robe, it was, as a rule, so carefully concealed that her suspicions never grew to certainties.

She was sitting opposite to him on this particular afternoon—a tall, slim girl with a colourless face and liquid grey eyes, shaded by magnificent lashes—a girl whose beauty failed to strike at first sight, but grew upon you the more you saw it. Some people, deceived by her absence of colour, called her plain, though everyone agreed that she had a certain simple, stately grace of her own that individualized her.

"Muriel," said her father, looking up suddenly from his paper, "Lord Urwick left word at the office that he should call this evening."

A bright colour flamed into the girl's cheeks, and her eyes fell—signs that were not lost on the speaker.

"I wish," he continued, rather petulantly, "you would get over your shyness, and talk to him when he is here. It seems as if his appearance were the signal of your silence, for directly he comes in the room you are dumb, no matter how eloquent you may have been a minute before."

"He takes more interest in your conversation than in mine, papa."

"Pshaw, nonsense! Do you suppose he comes to see an old man like me? Young as you are, you are surely woman enough to know better than that!"

"He has certainly never given me reason to suppose his visits have any reference to me," she rejoined, quietly. "In fact, so far as I can make out, his motives for coming at all consist in his desire to talk over business matters that you have not time to attend to during the day."

"You certainly lack one of the leading attributes of your sex—vanity!" said Darley, with an uneasy laugh. "However, more unlikely things have happened than a viscount making love to a lawyer's daughter, romantic as it may sound; and a coroner would look very well on that brown hair of yours."

The girl blushed deeply and turned away, evidently with no desire to continue the conversation. Her father glanced critically at her dress, which was one of black silk.

"Black doesn't suit you," he remarked, discontentedly, when his survey was over. "It is a pity you had to go into mourning for your aunt just now."

"Poor aunt!" murmured Muriel, involuntarily. "I wish I had seen and known more of her!"

"Wish nothing of the sort. She was an inconsistent, pig-headed creature, who had no respect for the claims of kindred!" cried Darley, angrily. "If she had had her way she would have willed every penny she possessed to a stranger."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this. Only three days before her death she gave instructions for a will to be made, leaving that adopted nephew of hers, Phillip Greville, all she had. Luckily she died before signing it, otherwise neither you nor I would have benefited one farthing by her wealth."

"But," said Muriel, her eyes opening very wide, "if she gave instructions for such a will to be made, it must have been her wish that Mr. Greville should be her heir!"

"Assuredly, there can be no doubt of that."

"Then, you surely will not take advantage of a point of law, such as her not having had time to sign the will; surely you will act as if the signature had been there?"

"Surely I shall do nothing of the sort! Are you mad, to suggest such a thing? Don't you know she was a very wealthy woman, and her money, added to mine, will make a rich heiress of you?"

"I don't want her money. I should hate to be enriched by such diabolical means!" rising in her excitement, and speaking with vehement force. "I should always feel the money belonged to Phillip Greville, not to me!"

"That's because you are a fool," observed her father, trenchantly.

She hesitated a moment, and then came and knelt at his side, earnest entreaty shining in her luminous eyes.

"Papa, dear papa, do give it him, for my sake—if not the whole, at least a part!"

"Not one brass farthing!—he has had too much already. A splendid education, a luxurious life, unlimited pocket-money! Why, he must consider himself one of the luckiest fellows under the sun to have fared so well. Besides, he has his profession of artist—" with a sneer, that seemed to say the "profession of artist" was one Mr. Darley was not inclined to estimate very highly.

A bitter answer rose to Muriel's lips, but it was unspoken, for at that minute a servant entered the room.

"If you please, sir, a gentleman, giving the name of Greville has called, and wishes to speak to you—he says he won't detain you long."

"Tell him I can't see him," began the lawyer, hastily; then, as if struck by some idea, "On second thoughts, I will see him; bring him in."

"Don't be hard on him, papa," whispered Muriel, as Phillip entered.

The few days that had passed since Mrs. Maxwell's death had been sufficient to produce a great change in the young man; he looked years older than his actual age, and there were deep lines on his face, telling of many hours' anxious

thought. He bowed to Muriel, and addressed Mr. Darley with cold civility.

"I called for the purpose of asking if you had found the letters I spoke of the other day. I am anxious to refer to them," he said.

"I have been very busy of late, and haven't looked through the documents left by my sister, as yet," returned Darley, curiously irritated at the utter absence of hostility in the young man's manner.

"It is rather of importance that I should have them at once," said Phillip, hesitating.

"Unfortunately, my time is of too much value for me to institute an immediate search," sneered the lawyer, turning away. "As I told you before, you shall have the letters—supposing them to exist—as soon as I find them."

Greville saw that it would be of no avail to say more, so, with a bow that included father and daughter, he left the room; but before he had gone far a small hand was laid gently on his sleeve, and Muriel Darley stood beside him.

"Mr. Greville, I want to tell you it is not my wish you should be deprived of the money my aunt intended you to have," she exclaimed, eagerly. "If I had any influence in the matter the will should be carried out exactly as if it were properly executed, only, unfortunately—you will accept my sympathy, will you not? And don't blame me as having a share in taking your legacy from you," looking up at him with wistful, grey eyes.

"Blame you? Certainly not! But I am deeply grateful for your kindness," he said, pressing his lips to her hand. "Besides, I really had no right to the money, and so I have no right to feel aggrieved at not getting it."

"And," went on Muriel, hesitating, "I should like to be your friend, and help you if I could. Are you in want of money?"

"Oh, no!" said Phillip, colouring, but really touched by her evident sincerity. "I have plenty to go on with, and I am working hard at a picture which I hope to sell. If I can only get work to do I shall be all right."

Muriel remained for a few seconds lost in thought, then she said,—

"Well, at all events, leave me your address, and I may hear of something for you. If I should have a chance of coming across the letters you spoke of—but I don't think it in the least likely—I will forward them to you at once."

He complied with her request by tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, and writing on it the name of the street where he had taken apartments on leaving Gordon-square, and then, thanking her, he wished her good-bye, and left the house.

Soon afterwards the expected visitor arrived, and was welcomed very cordially by his host, who begged him to be seated and pressed him to have some wine—an invitation he was not backward in accepting.

Lord Urwicke was a tall, fair, distinguished-looking man of about thirty, with a blonde moustache and, just now, a very harassed expression of countenance. Truth to tell, he took little notice of Muriel on entering, beyond a courteous inquiry after her health, and did not make the least effort to enter into conversation with her.

"I called at your office this morning, Darley, but found you out—my usual luck," he observed. "There never was such an unfortunate beggar under the sun as myself."

"Fortune is fickle, my dear Viscount!" returned the lawyer, blandly; "and often when she frowns most she is only concealing some good in the future."

"The future!" he echoed, shuddering. "I hate thinking of it! The fact is," breaking off abruptly, and casting a glance at Muriel, "I want to talk to you on rather important matters of business, if you can spare me five minutes."

Muriel instantly accepted the hint, and rose to leave the room, Lord Urwicke hastening to open the door for her exit.

As she disappeared he breathed a sigh of relief, and, coming back to the table, drew his chair up close to that of Darley, and began speaking, but

in a low tone, so that there should be no possibility of their being overheard.

"The crash has come at last, Darley; I'm at the very end of my tether now, and to-morrow by this time, unless the mortgage-money be paid, Cassells will foreclose, and I shall lose everything."

"Ah! not a very cheerful look-out certainly!"

"Cheerful! Why it's enough to make a fellow blow his brains out, and if it were not for the cowardice of the thing I'd do it!"

"Nonsense! There may be a way out of your difficulty even yet."

"If there is, I don't see it. I've been trying to get a talk with you for the last three or four days, but you've always been out when I called at the office."

Mr. Darley had a motive for being "always out," but this he prudently refrained from mentioning.

"Now tell me exactly how matters stand," he said, crossing one leg over the other, "and then we'll see what is to be done."

Lord Urwicke stared.

"Tell you how matters stand!" he repeated.

"Why you know as well as I do—perhaps better. You are perfectly aware that I have been an infernal scoundrel, and mortgaged the Urwicke estates for as much as I could get on them—that Cassells, the mortgagee, has called in the money, and I have not got it to pay him, so at sunset to-morrow my inheritance passes from me," speaking in a tone of bitter, passionate regret. "I would not care for anything else—that my folly has brought me to, but I'd rather suffer ten thousand torments than have my birthright taken from me!"

"And yet you have known how matters were tending for a long time," observed Darley, with an ill-concealed sneer.

"Have known—yes! But all the while I thought my luck would change. I thought I should be able to retrieve everything, and I should too, if that jockey had not played me false at Doncaster. It was Deiliah failing to win the race that put the finishing stroke to my ruin."

"You are not the only man to whose misfortune Deiliah has put the finishing stroke," remarked the lawyer, drily. "But that's neither here nor there. The mischief's done, and the question is, how to repair it? You have absolutely no resource left?"

"None whatever, unless," hesitating as one who feels his ground, "you were to take up the mortgage yourself, and give me time to pay it off. You know when my aunt dies I expect to come in for a good slice of her property."

"Your aunt's money is only a probability, not an assured thing—certainly not worth a *post obit*," answered Darley, shaking his head; and then the two men relapsed into silence, the elder watching the younger very keenly from between the fingers he had put up to screen his face.

"Then it's no use talking any more; it's all up with me, and I must go to the devil as soon as I can—the sooner the better!" exclaimed Urwicke, recklessly, jumping up and showing a haggard white face, whose despair was not concealed by his affectation of indifference. "Well, it's my own fault, and it serves me right. I don't complain, only—"

He stopped, and stared moodily at the wall opposite, looking at it with a blank sort of gaze that perceived nothing.

"Stay a minute," said the lawyer, deliberately. "I have one last proposal to make, by which you may yet be saved—that is to say, if you accept it. Your deepest regrets, I understand, are for the Urwicke property. Now of that property I am the mortgagee, not Cassells, and—"

"You will give me time then?" cried the Viscount, a flash of hope kindling in his eyes.

"Hush!" said the lawyer, lifting his hand, "hear me in silence. Those estates I intend for my daughter's dowry, so I shall accept no compromise with regard to them, but whoever marries her becomes master of Urwicke Towers."

For a brief interval both men sat looking at each other, trying instinctively to penetrate each other's thoughts.

"Then Miss Darley will be a rich prize for anyone fortunate enough to get her," said the Viscount, at last, with a forced laugh.

"She will, for she is a prize in herself," rejoined Darley, emphatically. "Now, my lord, let us come to the point without any more beating about the bush—will you marry her?"

Lord Urwicke started violently.

Marry Muriel Darley, the daughter of a second-rate attorney—a money-lender, in fact—he, in whose veins ran some of the best blood in the kingdom!

The very idea of it was hateful, and, besides, he did not care for the girl herself.

To him she was simply a pale, quiet, cold creature, without pretensions either to talent or beauty—the very last in the world he would have sought for his wife.

As he thought of her there came before him another picture—that of a dark, imperious, rose-lipped woman, with the fascination of a Cleopatra in her dark eyes, and the remembrance made him groan—but yet—His heritage, that had come down to him from so many generations—his good name that had been for so long unscathed!

"Does Miss Darley know of your intention to make this proposal to me?" he asked, at length, very contraindicatedly.

"She has not the faintest idea of it; nevertheless, I do not doubt her acquiescence."

"No," thought Urwicke, bitterly, "the prospect of a coronet would be too dazzling for her to resist." Aloud he said, "Before we pursue this subject any further I must tell you that my affections are already engaged."

"Do you mean you are betrothed to anyone?" demanded Darley, with knitted brows.

"No, my position was such that I could not honourably enter into a formal engagement, so I am free as far as that goes. What I mean to say was, that, supposing I accepted your suggestion, I could make no pretence to—love."

"That is quite a minor consideration," said the lawyer, coolly. "It has always seemed to me that people who begin their married life on esteem, and a moderate amount of liking, stand a much greater chance of happiness than those whose violent passion probably wears itself out in three months. I believe you would be kind to my girl, and, therefore, I wish you to have her."

"You wish me to have her because you'd like to have a daughter a viscountess," thought Urwicke, not replying to this remark.

As a matter of fact he did not put faith in Darley's declaration that Muriel knew nothing of this proposal. He was inclined to believe they had talked it over between themselves, and the girl had resolved to raise herself on his downfall to a pedestal in society that she could never otherwise have attained.

He pondered on his position, and cursed the reckless folly that had brought him to it. Clearly he had but one alternative, either to let everything go, emigrate to Australia, so as not to remain in the country where his disgrace was known, and let his dis honoured name die out, or marry Muriel, and with her money restore the shattered fortunes of his race.

As for that other woman—well, in any case, she could not be his wife; and it not she, it mattered little who.

"I agree to your terms," he said, at last, coldly and incisively, "on condition that I am not required to make a fool of myself in the way of love-making. Please impress on Miss Darley the necessity of dispensing with this time-honoured custom, and then you can make what arrangements you think proper."

"That is well," exclaimed Darley, triumphant at the success of his plans, and shaking hands heartily with his prospective son-in-law. "The wedding shall be fixed as soon as possible; and on that day I'll give into your hands the title-deeds of the Urwicke estates intact. A goodly heritage to descend to your children and my grandchildren."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. JOSEPH DARLEY was not only a clever man in his profession, but, in addition, a clever man

out of it. He had studied human nature pretty keenly, and fancied he knew it thoroughly, so taking one consideration with another, he was a man who might be expected to bring to a successful issue any enterprise on which he embarked.

He had long ago made up his mind that his daughter should marry well—should marry a nobleman if possible—and thus all his energies were devoted to the task of inducing Muriel to acquiesce in his plans.

It was not such a very easy task either, as he knew perfectly well, for Muriel's nature was intensely proud and sensitive; and had she for a moment imagined how matters really stood, nothing in the world would have prevailed upon her to marry Lord Urwicke. As it was, this knowledge was carefully kept from her.

When Darley told her of the Viscount's offer for her hand she was naturally surprised, as his manner had certainly never led her to imagine he cared for her, but at the same time no idea of his mercenary motives entered her head. She fancied him rich, and what reason could he—a nobleman—have for desiring to wed her but the all-powerful one of love!

Thus she reasoned—her soul in a very transport of delight the while—for although she had never expected a return she had grown to love Lord Urwicke with her whole heart, and had treasured up his slightest look or word as her dearest memories.

It struck her as strange that he should leave her father to ask an answer to his suit, and she was involuntarily chilled by his manner, when at their next meeting he placed a costly circlet of diamonds round her finger in token of their betrothal.

No lover-like caresses passed between them; he did not even press her lips, but contented himself with touching her cheek as coldly as if it had been a piece of marble, instead of warm, living flesh.

Still he was anxious their wedding should be fixed, thinking, indeed, the sooner it was over the better for both, and so her father bade her make the necessary preparations; and it was decided that they should be married in less than a month from the beginning of their engagement.

The intervening time was filled in choosing her trousseau, and all day long she was closeted with milliner and dressmaker, for Darley had given her *carte blanche* to order what she liked, and was himself constantly bringing her presents—silks, satins, priceless old lace, costly jewels fit for a countess. He was determined his daughter should enter her husband's family as befitting her future rank.

Thus it came about she had small space for reflection, or for brooding on the strangeness of Lord Urwicke's wooing, of which, indeed, so far as outward semblance went, she had no reason to complain.

The Viscount spent most of his evenings with his betrothed, either taking her to the opera or some other place of amusement, but only once sharing the privacy of her home. On this occasion they sat together on the couch, Lord Urwicke resting his arm on the back, which was the nearest approach to a caress he cared attempting. He felt rather bored, but he did not ask his betrothed to enlighten his dulness by giving him some music, not because he was not fond of it, but because it never struck him to do so; and, indeed, it may be doubted whether he was aware Muriel could play or sing, for a certain shyness in his presence that she had not yet been able to overcome had hitherto prevented her from making any attempt to show off her talents for his benefit.

There had been silence for awhile between them, and at last it became oppressive, and Muriel broke it.

"Is Urwicke Towers a large place?"

"Rather!"

"And are the grounds pretty?"

"Very."

"It is close to the sea, is it not?"

"Not very far off."

"Are there any other places—residences I mean—near?" going on with her questions, and undaunted by the laconic nature of his answers.

"The nearest is the Grange, which belongs to a Mr. Darrel, who, however, left it many years ago, and it has been shut up since. Then there is Heathcliff Priory, another large house about two miles away."

"Who lives there?"

"A Sir Jasper Ruthven and his sister."

"His sister! Is she young?" asked Muriel, hoping she might prove of an age to be companionable.

"About twenty-five, I think."

"And handsome?"

"Oh, pretty well," answered Urwicke, uneasily, and mentally anathematizing this feminine catechism which had brought him to a topic on which he would rather have preserved a strict silence towards his bride elect.

"Do you know her intimately?"

"Yes; we have seen a good deal of each other; living so near, you know, one could hardly avoid it."

"And living so near I should think you found it very pleasant," said Muriel, innocently, and wondering at the red flush that had crept over his face. "I suppose Heathcliff Priory is a large place?"

"Very large, and equally rambling. By-the-by, you are fond of pictures, aren't you?" with an effort to change the conversation. "Well, there are a lot of good ones at the Priory, the old masters, and that sort of thing, only they have been neglected and want renovating. Sir Jasper is looking out for some competent person to do it."

Instantly there flashed into Muriel's mind the recollection of Phillip. Would he not be glad to undertake the task?

"I know some one who would do it," she said, quickly; "an artist who I am sure is competent. His name is Phillip Greville. Do you think you can obtain the commission for him?"

"I have no doubt of it," returned Urwicke, somewhat surprised at her eagerness. "Only he will have to take up his abode in the house for a couple of months or so. The pictures are too valuable to be sent away. I'll write to Ruthven at once about it."

"Thank you," said Muriel, going on with her work.

"Oh, I have something to ask you," added the Viscount, with a slightly embarrassed air. "Your father asked me to-day where we were to spend the—the honeymoon," with a slight sneering emphasis on the word, "and I said I would consult you. Have you any preference? Shall we go to Paris, Vienna, Rome, Egypt, the North Pole?"

"I was thinking I would rather spend it at Urwicke Towers than anywhere else," replied Muriel, a blush as lovely as that in the heart of a damask rose spreading itself over her cheeks.

"That is a splendid idea!" exclaimed the Viscount, eagerly, but without even observing the blush. "I call it a most senseless custom to pack a couple off like a pair of Cook's excursionists just because they happen to be newly married. Very well, then, it is settled we go to Urwicke Towers!"

As a result of part of this conversation Muriel, three days afterwards, took her way to the address given by Phillip, in order to ask the young man whether he would accept the commission she had obtained for him. She would not write, for, with a true woman's instinct, she felt Greville would have a repugnance to accepting any favour from her father's daughter, and this repugnance would be much more easily overcome by her presence than by a letter.

She found him at home, and was ushered into a small, dingy room, where he was working at an unfinished picture on an easel.

He looked worn and dispirited, and it was evident the battle of fighting the world single-handed had not been either a pleasant or profitable one so far.

After the greetings were over, Muriel proceeded to the object of her visit, and told the artist that, in addition to renovating, Sir Jasper Ruthven wished him to copy one of the pictures, and was also anxious that no time should be lost in commencing, so Greville must hold himself in

readiness to proceed to Heathcliff Priory the following week.

Although it went sadly against the grain with Phillip to accept favours, he was yet so sensible of Muriel's kindness, that he felt the least he could do in acknowledgment would be to yield a consent to her request.

Besides, he was really in want of something to do, for painting pictures on the chance of selling them was rather risky, whereas the terms offered by Sir Jasper were liberal in the extreme. He, therefore, promised to write at once, and fix a day for his arrival at Heathcliff Priory.

"Very well, that is settled," said Muriel, delighted at the success of her mission, and rising as she spoke.

"I suppose, Miss Darley, your father has not yet found the letters?" asked Phillip.

"I have not heard him mention them; but I will speak to him about them, and you shall have them before long," the girl replied.

Phillip put on his hat and prepared to escort his visitor home. When they had got about half way Muriel paused.

"I think, perhaps, you had better not come any farther; if papa were to see you—"

"I understand," Phillip returned, gently, taking her hand. "I thank you very much for your kindness, Miss Darley. Perhaps some time I shall be able to repay it."

Ah! if he could but have seen how and when he would repay it he would have shrunk back in horror from the terrible shadow threatening that fair young life.

But, happily for us, the dark curtain of the future is not unrolled, and the "to be" keeps its own secrets.

Unconscious of the strange way in which their two destinies were to cross each other, Phillip bade her farewell, and walked away, while Muriel turned round to find herself face to face with Lord Urwick!

(To be continued.)

TRUE GOLD.

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(Continued from page 201.)

At last the journey was over, and he was waiting in Vic's spacious drawing-room, feeling anything but comfortable. He had hitherto been thinking chiefly of Nora, for the telegram had stated that she was dying, but now that he was once more at Bracondale, the thought of meeting Vic made him feel ill-at-ease, for he knew that he had behaved disgracefully to her, and although he believed that she had been flirting with her cousin at the very time she was engaged to him, still his conscience whispered that was no excuse for his conduct.

But here his meditations were disturbed by the appearance of Marion Silvester, who entered the room with a grave, disguised manner, bowing slightly to Phillip as his only welcome.

"How is Nora?" he asked, with evident nervousness.

"She is still dangerously ill," replied Marion, "but fortunately you have come in time to see her, and I will take you to her at once," and opening the door she led the way in silence.

On the first landing she stopped at the door of Nora's room, and having let him pass in she closed it, and went away leaving him there.

"Poor little Vic!" she said, half-aloud, "this is indeed a trial for her."

As soon as Phillip Murray entered the apartment he heard the voice of the woman he loved calling wildly upon his name, and in another second he was by her side, clasping her in his strong arms.

"Nora! Nora! my darling!" he pleaded; "do speak to me! I have come back. Oh! give me one word of welcome, or my heart will break!" and stooping down he rained kisses upon her pure white brow; then leaning her head upon his breast he tried to soothe her, and after awhile she became calmer, although she continued perfectly insensible.

Vic had watched by the sick girl's side until she had heard her former lover ascend the stairs, then she had slipped into the room adjoining Nora's, and falling upon her knees she prayed to be enabled to forgive, as we all hope to be forgiven; and when she had ended her prayer she arose, and waited until it was time to give the patient her medicine, then she returned with trembling limbs and a blanched cheek to the sick room, but calm as ever.

When Phillip Murray saw her he coloured nervously, and started to his feet.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said Vic, quietly, "but Nora must have her cooling draught, it is so necessary for her," and having poured the mixture into a glass, she leant over the senseless girl, and gently made her swallow it.

"You make a good nurse, Miss Barrington," said Phillip, "and if Nora lives she will owe her life to you."

"I have only done my share," replied Vic, trying to smile. "Marion and I take it by turns to watch her during the day, and we have an experienced trained nurse to remain with her at night."

"How kind of you!" said Phillip, with genuine feeling, "and it is good indeed of your aunt to allow Nora to stay here."

"My poor dear aunt is dead," answered Vic, with tears starting to her eyes.

"Miss Lawrence dead!" said Phillip, in surprise; "then was it you who sent for me?"

"Yes, Mr. Murray," answered Vic, quietly.

"I sent for you, as Dr. Hammond said it was the only chance of saving that poor girl's life."

"Miss Barrington, how can I ever thank you!" said Phillip, with emotion. "But, tell me, who was it that paid my debts for me, and thus enabled me to return to England a free man? Vic, I believe it was you!" he continued, as he saw her turn away without answering his question, and going to her side he took her hand in his. "Vic, Vic! what a noble girl you are!" he said, fervently, "and how cruelly I have wronged you. Can you ever forgive me for all I have made you suffer?"

"Yes, Phillip, I forgive you!" she replied, with trembling voice, "and I hope you may yet be happy."

"Vic, before you speak to me like that, I must confess all to you. Perhaps you know that I took to betting this year; I did it, hoping to gain money, to enable me to furnish a house, and then settle down; but ill-luck constantly followed me, and I continually lost. Then I had to borrow, and Langley insisted on a good security; and so, Vic, having been told you were Miss Lawrence's heiress, I said I was engaged to you, and that Miss Lawrence had consented to my giving a security on the part of her property, upon which the White Lodge is built, and said she was going to give that to us as a wedding-present. So he gave me a deed to take to her to sign, and having a letter of hers in my possession, I forged her signature, and the signatures of two witnesses to the document. Then I took it back to him, and he was satisfied, and lent me the money I wanted."

"After obtaining it, I came to you, Vic, and told you I loved you, and asked you to be my wife; but, child, much as I liked you, I had no heart to give you, as that was already Nora's. And then I heard that you were not rich as I had supposed and I left you with the first excuse I could find. But I had my punishment, Vic; for that dear girl to whom you have been so kind, would have no more to do with me, being aware of my conduct. Although I went to her again and again after my quarrel with you, and entreated her to take me back, she would not listen to me; and my affairs being desperate I escaped from my creditors to Boulogne, where I have been hiding for the last month, waiting for a chance to get away from home altogether. But, thanks to your goodness, I am free from debt once more; though, until I know you fully forgive me, I shall be most miserable."

"Mr. Langley told my cousin about the security," said Vic, quietly, "and I could not understand it."

"And you sent for me after that?" said Phillip, in amazement.

"Yes," replied Vic. "The knowledge of your wrong-doing did not make any difference in my wish to save Nora's life; so I told Mr. Silvester to telegraph for you at once."

"Vic, for the love of Heaven, forgive me, or I shall never hold up my head again!"

"I have already told you that I forgive you," replied Vic, gently; "and if it is considered necessary for you to remain here on Nora's account, I will make you welcome."

"Is Bracondale yours, Vic?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Because I understood my sister you told her you were not Miss Lawrence's heiress."

"I told her what I did, Mr. Murray, because I had learnt to fear it was my money you wanted, and not me, so I pretended to be poor, in order to prove you; but it is all over now, and I do not wish to refer to the past again. Be a better man in future, Mr. Murray, and I shall consider myself well repaid for any small service I have rendered you."

"Heaven bless you, Vic," he answered, earnestly. "You have indeed forgiven me nobly, and acted generously, and I will begin a new life from to-day."

And after a few more words of gentle advice, she left him alone with the woman he loved.

CHAPTER IX.

A HAPPY CONCLUSION.

NORA MACKENZIE slowly but surely recovered, and after all danger had passed for her, Phillip Murray left Bracondale, and went to see his former employer, and begged him to take him back; and at last the old man consented to do so, and he returned to his work once more. And his master, seeing how greatly improved he was, did his best to help him on, having known him from boyhood, and having always been fond of him.

For a long time Nora would take no notice of Phillip, when her consciousness returned;—in fact, his presence seemed to annoy her; but little Vic, with her gentle words, at length made peace between them, and when happiness once more returned to her, her progress towards recovery was rapid; and so grateful was she to Vic that she could not bear her out of her sight.

In April, Felix Emmerson and Marion were married quietly in London, and went away to Switzerland, where they intended to remain three months, and then return and settle down, as by that time their new house would be ready for them.

Vic had decided she could not keep up all the Bracondale estate upon her diminished income, and had given Marion half the land on condition she built her nest there, laughingly telling her she did so for her own convenience, as when she became "a stupid old maid" she should want her near at hand, to take care of her. And thus the matter was settled; and after the wedding, Lance and Vic went to see the bride and bridegroom off at the station, and watching their bright, contented faces, they felt certain a life of happiness was before them.

"Vic," said Lance, when they found themselves the sole occupants of a first-class carriage, on their return journey: "seeing other people's happiness has made me long for a little sunshine myself. You know my past history, dear girl, and if you can forget that, and accept my love, I am sure we could be very happy together."

Vic blushed bowitchingly, but for a minute did not answer, feeling too glad for words.

"My little Vic, cannot you care for me just a wee bit?" asked Lancelot, pleadingly.

"Yes, Lance!" she replied, with a joyous smile. "I love you truly, and I am more than glad you think me worthy of your affection knowing how much I have loved another."

"We are quits on that score, Vic," laughed Lance, taking her in his arms, and kissing her

loudly, "and I, for one, am thankful things took the turn they did, for my Vic is the true gold, whereas Miss Hartland's love was only a worthless imitation; she has already quarrelled with her husband, and he has left her."

"Perhaps she may not have been to blame for that," said Vic, quietly.

"I think she was, dear, for report says she was so fearfully fast; he could not put up with her any longer."

"I hope we shall never part, dearest!" said Vic, gently.

"I am certain we never shall, darling!" answered Lance, brightly, "and now, sweetheart, how long are you going to keep me waiting! When can I claim you, love, for my own little wife!"

"In about a year, Lance," replied Vic, shyly.

"Will that do?"

"Certainly not, you saucy girl! Three months is the outside I can wait!" laughed Lance.

And after some persuasion, Vic consented that their marriage should take place as soon as Marion and Felix returned home.

Philip Murray took a pretty little cottage just out of London, which he furnished simply, but nicely, and as soon as Nora was well enough she was transplanted to her new home, and she soon regained her spirits and her beauty, under the influence of her husband's love and unceasing devotion; for he had kept his promise to little Vic, and had indeed turned over a new leaf, and was soon both liked and respected by all who knew him.

Late in July the travellers returned, finding their house quite ready for them, all prettily arranged under Vic's directions; she having presented them with all their furniture as her wedding gift; and a month after Lancelot Silvester claimed the fulfilment of his cousin's promise, and they were quietly married in their own village church, and settled down at once at Bracondale, where they decided to live; and as years rolled on neither Vic nor her husband ever regretted their past loves, and each season made them more contented and happy.

[THE END.]

MY SWEETHEART.

CHAPTER LXXII.

It seemed to Paula that the whole world stood still.

"Is it Frank who has found me out, or—or is it his mother who has come to add insult to injury again!" the girl muttered, pressing her hand closely over her heart.

She had said: "Show the lady into this room," supposing it to be Jane. An instant later she saw a lingering footman standing in the door-way.

"My lady is not able to leave the carriage," he said, touching his hat. "Will you kindly come out to her?"

Paula drew back, her face white as it would ever be in death, and looked at the man.

"No, no; I cannot go!" she cried, huskily. "Another interview would only be distressing to both of us. Please tell her I cannot come to her."

At this juncture a shadow fell between her and the sunshine, and before Paula could utter one word, one cry, Mrs. Brunton had tottered quickly into the room, and had flung herself at the girl's feet.

"As you are good, be merciful! Hear my words before you turn from me! I laid a command upon you when last we met, but now I am come to sue for a favour—the greatest favour woman could grant to woman. See, how I kneel at your feet; I, a proud woman, kneeling here in the very ashes of my despair!"

"You must not kneel to me," cried Paula, "anything but that! I—I—I know your son came to see me to-day, but I was not there, I

left word that I would never see him again—never while the sun shone, or the stars gave light, and I repeat that I will keep my word. You may rest content, madam."

Mrs. Brunton's emotion was so intense she could not speak and thus explain herself.

"You may feel satisfied," continued the girl; "you have parted us as completely asunder as though we lay in our graves. I should think that ought to satisfy you."

But Mrs. Brunton only wrung her hands the more, and at length dropped back in a deep swoon at her feet.

A shriek of dismay broke from Paula's lips. In an instant she had summoned help. It was some little time ere Mrs. Brunton regained consciousness, and then for a brief space her mind was too crowded to fully remember all that had transpired.

Then, looking up in dazed amazement at the strangers gathered about her, her eyes fell upon Paula Garstin's face.

With a cry that those who heard it never forgot, she started to her feet.

"Oh, heavens, heavens!" she cried, "are we here yet! Oh, my boy!"

Those who were crowded around her looked from one to the other.

With a bitter sob, she held her hand out to Paula.

"Come with me to my son," she gasped. "He is dying!"

The words startled Paula as with an electric shock.

"Dying!" cried Paula, in wild alarm, scarcely thinking she had heard aright.

"Yes," she answered, "and for the love of Heaven come with me quick to him. We have not a moment's time to lose."

Paula never remembered how she listened to the rapidly uttered tale of woe that broke from the agonized mother's pale lips. She only knew that in less time than it takes to tell it she was whirling rapidly towards her lover; and although her heart was almost broken, she was trying to comfort the distracted mother.

"John, John, lash the horses!" cried Mrs. Brunton, beating her hands in agony; "they are only creeping along!"

"They are doing their very best, ma'am," answered the driver.

At the corner of one of the avenues there was a blockade of vehicles which brought them to a standstill.

"Oh, we shall be too late—we shall be too late!" was the sobbing cry that welled up from the mother's heart, and which was echoed in Paula's.

But at that moment, in glancing anxiously from the window, a slight met her gaze that turned every drop of blood in her veins to ice. It was a dark face, and its owner was regarding her intently.

One glance, and Paula knew it was no delusion—the face before her was Pierce Dudley's!

She did not faint; she did not utter any moan.

Pierce Dudley leaned forward in his carriage, and their eyes met.

"Yes, it is Paula!" he muttered, "by all that is merciful!"

He turned to the driver and gave him hurried directions.

"Do you see that carriage directly opposite!"

"Yes, sir," replied the man.

"Could you find it if we went up to the corner above and made a turn to get back here again? I want to learn its destination."

"That is Mr. Brunton's carriage, sir," replied the man. "They live down the avenue some little distance from here."

"Oh, you know where it is, then, and can easily find it!"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, touching his hat and whipping up the horses.

"You may follow them at a little distance."

Looking fearfully back from the carriage window in the rear, Paula saw Dudley make a turn, and knew that he intended to follow her.

"My evil genius has found me out!" and Paula sank back amid the cushions, almost fainting with the horror of the situation.

But her thoughts were one wild chaos of conflicting emotions. Even this great shock could not hold her thoughts for a moment, however, from the still greater anxiety that filled her heart and soul on Frank's account.

After what seemed to both Paula and Mrs. Brunton an age, the carriage drew up before the door.

The footman met them at the door.

"My son!" gasped the mother; and Paula looked the thought she dared not express in words.

Tears sprang to the old butler's eyes as he answered, slowly:

"He is going very fast—Heaven bless Master Frank!—but I think you are still in time."

Mrs. Brunton would have fallen to the floor had it not been for Paula's strong young arm which upheld her.

It was a most solemn moment when they reached the door. The doctor heard them coming, and advanced to meet them.

There was no word he could utter. Silently he took the mother's hand and that of the young girl, who advanced with a face as white as death, to the bedside.

Mrs. Brunton sank down by the couch; but, with a piercing cry that brought tears to the eyes of all who heard it, Paula flung herself upon her lover's breast, sobbing out so wildly it could almost have pierced the dull, cold ear of Death:

"Oh, my love! live for me, or let me die with you! How could the sun shine and the flowers bloom if you were taken from me! Oh, Frank, Frank, open your eyes, love, and hear me! Gaze into my face with those eyes that have been my lodestar! Speak to me! look at me! I am here by your side—your Paula who loves you so!"

They saw the eyelids quiver and the lips more perceptibly.

"Thank God!" cried the doctor. "You have called his soul back as it trembled on the brink of eternity—back to the world and love again! If he lives, it will be due to you."

As he spoke, the young man's eyelids opened as though by a great effort, and his eyes fastened themselves upon the beautiful tear-wet face bending so breathlessly over him.

In all that room full of people he saw only her.

"Is it a dream, Paula!" he whispered in a low voice. "It cannot be reality. I have had this dream so often that it mocks my senses."

The warm clasp of those flesh-and-blood arms tightened around him.

"It is no dream; I am with you, Frank," sobbed the girl; "praying for you to live for my sake."

Silently the doctor motioned the rest to leave the room—all save Mrs. Brunton and Paula—and they obeyed.

It was an hour or more before they were recalled to the sick chamber. They found Mrs. Brunton weeping tears of joy.

"I want you to gather around me, every one of you—you have been tried and true family servants for long years. I want to tell you, one and all, the joyful tidings. My son—my darling only son—will live! And I have yet more to say: This day, which sees him drawn from the brink of eternity, shall also be his wedding-day. Let a clergyman be sent for at once. He is to marry the young lady whom I brought home me, within the hour. Let there be great rejoicing among you, for you all loved my darling, only son. Let some one of you send a telegram to his father, whom you apprised of the accident, that he is out of danger. I wish I could cry out to the whole world how happy, how grateful I am that Heaven has spared my only boy!"

There was not a dry eye among that group of servants, for they all loved Master Frank, who always had a pleasant word for each one of them, and a little change in his pockets for any who stepped out of the way to do him the slightest service.

There were murmurs of joy from every lip, and every face was wreathed in smiles.

"Let this message for the clergyman be sent without delay!" added Mrs. Brunton, placing a square envelope in the butler's hand, "and the

rest of you shall bring flowers from the conservatory to deck the room. We must make it look like a floral bower instead of a sick-chamber—we haven't much time to make the alteration, either."

They flew to do her bidding with alacrity.

The butler had so much to see to that he entrusted his boy with the note, as his destination was only two houses distant.

At the corner the lad encountered a tall, dark gentleman who was pacing restlessly up and down.

"Would you like to make half-a-crown, my boy?" he asked, quickly.

"I wish I could, sir; but I'm sent on an errand," replied the boy, ruefully. "I must deliver this letter first."

"I will hold the letter for you, my lad. I want a cab; they are only around the corner; it wouldn't take you a minute to order one for me."

The boy hesitated—and was lost. To make half-a-crown so easily was too much of a temptation. He handed the stranger the letter, and sped quickly on the stranger's errand. The man was Pierce Dudley.

The lad had scarcely turned the corner ere he tore open the note and appraised himself of its contents.

"So, so, fair Paula!" he muttered. "It seems I am just in the nick of time to step between you and happiness again."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

When Dudley made himself familiar with the contents of the note, a cry of wrath broke from his lips.

"She shall never marry Branton," he exclaimed, wrathfully. "If I can prevent it!"

He turned on his heel and retraced his steps, his plans forming themselves in his mind as he went.

When he reached the Branton's house he walked boldly up the steps and rang the bell.

"Can I see Mr. Frank Branton?" he asked of the footman who answered the summons.

"Unfortunately no, sir," replied the man. "Mr. Branton is hardly expected to live."

Dudley looked at him in astonishment.

"He is to be married," he said, shortly, "and how could that be if what you say is true? I must see him. It is very important—it is connected with this marriage!"

"I will take your card, sir, and see," responded the man; "but I doubt very much whether they will allow a stranger to see him or not."

"Do your best to secure this interview for me," said Dudley, slipping a coin into the man's hand. "But hold!" he cried, as the servant was about to turn away. "I am a particular friend of the lady whom he is about to wed. Perhaps it would be as well for you to acquaint her of my presence here. Say that I wish to see her on the most important business."

After giving the man his card, he walked impatiently up and down the room, and the smile on his lips grew demoniacal as, after a pause of a very few moments, he heard hurried footsteps in the corridor without, which he recognised at once.

An instant later the portières were flung apart, and Paula, pale as a marble statue, stood before him.

Pierce made an elaborate, mocking bow.

"I congratulate you on your timely escape from the ill-fated yacht, my dear Miss Garstin," he said; adding: "Your fate was a mystery to me, until, by the merest accident, I encountered you out driving. I need scarcely say that I followed you to pay you my respects, for you are so clever you have already guessed that."

The girl advanced a step, still looking like an image carved in marble, so deathly was her pallor.

"Why are you here?" she gasped. "Speak plainly."

"Not a very graceful welcome, I must say," remarked Dudley, coolly.

"You are my evil genius!" cried the girl, "and I have said that if you ever crossed my path again in this life I would kill myself and end it all!"

And as she spoke, Paula drew a long thin vial from the pocket of her dress.

"When your card was brought to me I caught up this vial from the table of the sick-room. One drop is beneficial; ten produces death. See how I free myself of your presence and persecution from this time on—forever! You can not follow me beyond the gates of death!"

And before Dudley could recover from his amazement at this sudden outburst, the girl had swallowed half its contents.

Dudley had no wish to stand there and face the consequences. With a cry of horror and one backward glance, he dashed from the room and out into the street.

A cab was passing leisurely, and he quickly hailed it.

"Drive on to Tilbury!" he cried hoarsely. "Get there as soon as possible, and you shall name your own price!"

Thoughts flashed quick as lightning through Dudley's brain.

As soon as Paula's condition was discovered they would make search for him, believing him to be the cause of it. All the testimony in the world could not clear him, he knew.

There was only one way for him, and that was instant flight. He would leave the country at once, on the first out-going steamer. Fortunately one sailed that very afternoon; but he could not go without first bidding adieu to the one being on earth who would miss him—the girl who had once saved his life—Lucy Hill.

It was Saturday. He knew she would be at home from work early. He met her, as fate or fortune would have it, on her way going home. He stopped the cab.

"Lucy!" he called out, eagerly.

"Mr. Dudley," she said, with a blush. "Can it really be you?"

"Get in, Lucy," he called, gently, opening the door. He caught the girl's hand and drew her into the coach. "I was just watching for you."

"For me?" she exclaimed, in pleased surprise; but the smile was not reflected on his face.

"I am come to say 'farewell' to you, Lucy," he remarked, hoarsely. "I am going away."

The girl burst into tears.

"Does it grieve you, Lucy?" he asked; and his voice grew soft and gentle, and the hard look died out of his eyes.

The girl hung her beautiful head. His arm stole round her waist.

"Do you care, Lucy?" he asked. "Does the thought of my going grieve you?"

The lovely head was bowed still lower, and her slender frame shook with suppressed sobbing.

It seemed in that moment to Pierce Dudley that his whole nature changed. A strange sensation that he could not wholly account for stole over him—softened his heart. The icy cynicism of his whole being seemed to melt then and there like snow before the sunshine of a summer noonday.

Then and there it occurred to him how sweet and beautiful life might be, even to a *blasé* man of the world like himself, with love—a pure, true, sweet love to brighten it.

He felt sure poor little Lucy loved him with her whole heart. Many a time he had laughed at her in his own mind—scoffed at the earnest simplicity of this little country girl.

It had never occurred to him to make love to her, she was an unsophisticated lass—almost a child in her knowledge of the world and the men in it.

Now that very innocence seemed to shine upon him in a new light. It seemed to raise her from the depth and purity of childhood to the height of an angel.

All in a moment, when the time came for him to part from her and never look upon her face again, the knowledge came to him, with the swiftness, suddenness of a blow, that it would not be hard to love this girl—if indeed he did not love her already—with all the strength of his heart.

There rose up before his mental vision the

thought—how sweet it would be to take this shy, timid young creature away from her life of toil, and show her the beauty and joy of the world outside.

How she would cling to him, and love him, and appreciate every comfort that came to her from his hands!

He was tired and world-weary—tired of seeking and pursuing phantom pleasures that turned to Dead Sea fruit at his touch.

"Will you miss me when I am gone, Lucy?" he repeated.

His dark, handsome head bent low until his curls brushed the girl's pale cheek.

"Do you care to be parted from me?" he whispered again. "Answer me, Lucy, and your answer may perhaps change the whole current of your after life. Speak up bravely, my little girl—tell me just what is in your heart."

She looked up at him through her tears.

"Life would never be—the same to me if—if you went away," she faltered, her sweet young voice quivering grievously.

"But what if you went with me, Lucy?" he whispered.

She drew back and looked at him with wondering, innocent eyes.

"I love you, little one," said Dudley, huskily, "and I want you to marry me and go with me as my wife. I love you with all my heart, Lucy, and I will try to make you so happy you will never regret marrying me."

He tried to say some of the pretty, flowery, complimentary nothings in poetic language that he had uttered to hundreds of beautiful women in his time, smiling beneath his heavy mustache when he saw their eyes droop, their cheeks flush and pale, and the unmistakable language of reciprocated love shine in the lovely faces raised to him.

But now, for the first time in his eventful life, he found it impossible to clothe his thoughts in ideal language. He could only repeat over and over again those words: "I love you, Lucy!" and they came from the very depths of his heart.

All in a moment love had changed him from a veritable fiend incarnate to a humble lover, whose very life seemed to hang upon the simple words that would fall from the lips of the plain little girl by his side, and he felt that to lose Lucy would be to lose all that this world would ever hold dear in life for him.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

"Is it to be or not to be, little girl!" he asked, hoarsely; and Lucy nodded her head in assent.

He caught her in his arms and strained her to his breast.

"I will tell you the truth, little girl," he said: "my life has not been blameless. There are full many pages turned down that would break my heart to have your pure eyes read. But the past is past, Lucy, I cannot make or unmake it; yet my future belongs to you, to mould as you will. I am obliged to leave the country this very night, precious, and if you marry me it must be at once, within the hour."

"But mother!" gasped the girl, faintly, "what if we could not gain her consent?"

"Then we must be married without it," he responded, promptly, and to avoid even the slightest *contretemps*. "You must marry me before your mother has the opportunity to command you to give me up or to separate us."

She was such a good girl—such a dutiful one. Heaven only knows how it was he ever persuaded her to this step; but she loved him so well that even the thought of parting from him was more cruel than death to her.

In less than twelve hours' time little Lucy was Pierce Dudley's lawfully wedded wife.

"Come, my darling," he whispered; "we must go directly to the boat; there is no time to lose. I would not miss that steamer for a fortune!"

"But my mother!" gasped the girl. "Oh, I must bid her good-bye!"

Dudley's face darkened.

"We have no time," he said, a little sharply. "I could not go away without seeing my mother!" she sobbed.

"A girl must leave father and mother—say, the whole world, and cling to her husband!" he answered, sternly.

But Lucy was not to be persuaded.

"Think of my mother's grief, Pierce," she sobbed, piteously. "She has watched over me with loving care all these years, guided my footsteps when I was a tiny infant, unable to care for myself, rejoiced in my gladness and wept tears over my sorrows. Could I turn from her all in one moment, and without one loving clasp, one farewell kiss, put the whole breath of this earth between us?"

"No, no, I cannot—and I will not! You say a girl's first duty is to the man she marries. It is not; it is to the mother who bore her. Nothing in this world would tempt me to leave my mother thus. I am going to say good-bye to her, and as you love me and respect me, as you say you do, you will not oppose it."

"Heaven would visit its vengeance upon a girl who would betray the confidence and tender love of her mother just as sure as the stars shine and the sun gives light; she would never prosper."

This was a side of the girl's nature that was new to Dudley. He could not help but respect her for it.

"You are right, Lucy," he said, humbly. "So dutiful a daughter will make a true and loving wife that any man might be proud to win. Come, we will go to our mother together. Your people shall be my people, and thy God my God!"

The widow was greatly startled when Lucy came up the narrow path that led to the cottage door, leaning upon Dudley's arm. And she was almost overcome when she learned the true state of affairs.

"She has always been a good girl, sir. I hope you will prove worthy of her."

Dudley assured the widow that Lucy should never know want or toil again, and to make Lucy's happiness complete, it should be his pleasure to care for the mother as well, and she should accompany them.

Whereupon, hearing this, both mother and daughter fell into each other's arms, weeping the happiest tears they had ever shed in all their lives, and it made Dudley's heart glow to witness it.

He owed to himself that he felt a world better for this kindly humane action.

When the *Utopia* sailed that night, it carried among its passengers those three.

But Heaven did not intend that one whose life had been so black and evil should find such golden happiness at last. The ill-fated *Utopia* never reached her destination. She foundered in mid-ocean, and among the five hundred souls that went down was Dudley.

His bride and her mother were saved; but it was many and many a long day ere the girl ceased to grieve over his sudden loss. Heaven knew best.

We must now return to Paula.

When she had taken the fatal potion, the dreaded dizziness she had expected failed to come to her.

She glared at the vial. Surely there could be no mistake! Ah! yes, there was. In her great agitation, she had taken up the wrong bottle. What she had taken was simply a quieting draught for the nerves.

She looked about her—Dudley was not there, and she realized that he had fled rather than be discovered there and she in a dying condition.

"I have gone through so much," murmured the girl, "that nothing surprises me; but I am grateful after all, that my life, which I sought to take on the spur of the moment, is spared."

Trembling with nervous excitement, the girl wended her way back to the sick-room. So great was the turmoil over the grand preparations, the festooning of the room with banks of roses in anticipation of the coming wedding, that Paula's absence was not noticed save by Frank.

"Was it some friend, Paula?" he asked, wistfully.

"Yes—no!" she answered, with a shudder.

"I meant to tell you, dear," he said, "that I have just despatched a message for an old friend of mine. It will be a great surprise to him to learn of my intended sudden marriage. He invited me to his own wedding, which is soon to take place, and I consented to be best man for him. He will come with the girl whom he is to wed, and I hope, Paula, you will like them for my sake if not for their own."

"Any one whom you care to have here will be pleasing to me," she murmured, bending her beautiful head low.

"Have you no friends, my darling, you would care to send for?"

Instantly Paula's thoughts flew to Mildred. Her cheeks paled, and a distressed look crept into her eyes.

She dared not write her, for the shock of receiving the letter might prove too much for Mildred—for she believed Paula dead.

"No," she said, simply, "unless it might be Jane Bolton."

"Send for her by all means, dearest," and this was done.

At that self-same moment Gregor Thorpe was knocking at the door of Mrs. Morris's humble cottage.

Mildred met him at the door.

"I know my coming will surprise you Mildred," he said, "but you will not wonder that I came in all haste when you learn my errand."

Thereupon he produced a note and handed it to Mildred.

"My friend, Frank Brunton, of whom you have heard me speak so often, is lying on his death-bed, Mildred, and he has sent for me. Strangest of all, he is to be wedded to the young girl whom he loves, that he may leave behind him—if his illness takes a fatal turn—his wife instead of his sweetheart. In the hasty note which he has dictated, he adds: 'Bring your fiancée with you, and any other friends whom you desire.' Perhaps Mrs. Morris will accompany us."

That lady signified her willingness, and they were soon en route towards the Brunton mansion.

"A death-bed marriage," remarked Mrs. Morris, musingly, as the carriage bowed swiftly along the avenue. "I cannot say I approve of them. There seems to be something so uncanny about them. The bride-elect must be very much attached to him to desire it," she went on.

At that moment the carriage stopped at their destination.

Mrs. Brunton was waiting for the party, and welcomed them eagerly.

"I had almost begun to fear that you were not coming," she remarked. "My son seems to have taken a turn for the worse," she went on, with a quiver in her voice, "and we are anxious to have the ceremony over, for his sake, as quickly as possible."

"I can understand your anxiety," returned Gregor.

When Mildred spoke to the grieving mother, Mrs. Brunton turned to her with a start.

"How like!" she exclaimed. "Ah, my dear, you have the same intonation of voice, the same sweet mannerism as the young woman whom my son is to wed to-day."

Mildred bowed, scarcely knowing what reply to make.

"But come!" she said, "I must take you without delay to Frank's room," and preceding them she led the way down the corridor and up the velvet stairway that led to her son's apartment.

The meeting between Gregor Thorpe and his old friend was affectionate in the extreme.

The moment Gregor's eyes fell upon him he felt that Frank would never live to have the ceremony performed.

Mrs. Morris was introduced, and then timid, dark-eyed Mildred was led forward.

The moment her eyes fell upon the pale, handsome face of the young man she felt a profound interest for him that she could scarcely define.

"My fiancée will be here directly," said Frank, turning his unusually bright eyes from one to the other. "She is in mother's hands just now."

Five—ten minutes passed; then the clergyman

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arrived, and like Gregor, the thought flashed across his mind the moment his eyes rested on the handsome face which grew paler and paler with each passing moment, that his chance of recovery, or even living until the ceremony should be consummated, was indeed small.

He signified to Frank's father, who had at that moment arrived, that if the ceremony were to take place at all, it were best that it should be done quickly.

One of the servants was despatched to Mrs. Branton's boudoir, urging that she should make all haste to bring the bride-alect. Still, the moments passed—there were no signs of her. Again, another messenger was sent, urging them to hasten, for the young man's case was growing more critical. But the young girl returned with the startling intelligence that the young lady was not there, and that Mrs. Branton was lying on the floor of her boudoir in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER LXXV.

WHEN Paula had accompanied Mrs. Branton to her boudoir to freshen up her toilet a bit, and twine a few roses in her hair, the bell had suddenly rung, and Mrs. Branton had exclaimed,—

"Is it the guests whom we are expecting? Excuse me for one moment, dear—I will be with you almost directly. I will go and welcome them myself," and saluting the action to the word, the lady hastily quitted the room.

A moment later there was the sound of voices in the corridor below, and strangely familiar ones they were to Paula. Her heart gave a mad, strangling throb.

Where had she heard those voices before? The room seemed to whirl around her and the light from the summer sunshine outside to grow suddenly dark.

She flung open the door, but the air seemed stifling. The voices sounded louder. There was no mistaking those tones longer. They belonged to Gregor Thorpe and Mrs. Morris.

What were they doing here? She tried to think the matter out clearly, but her benumbed brain refused to think. One idea presented itself before her; that the world was closing in around her. If Frank Branton knew of her past he would never marry her.

Life had gone all wrong with her from beginning to end. This was the last straw that made the burden unendurably heavy. Her brain began to reel beneath its awful blow. But one thought came to her clearly, and that was that she must get away, and quickly—it did not matter where. She made her way rapidly down into the corridor below. To gain the street she must pass the drawing-room where they sat, the door of which stood wide open. As Paula neared it, still another voice fell upon her ear, and this time the girl stood quite still, as though the hand of death had suddenly smitten her.

There was no mistaking that voice. It was Mildred's. All in an instant her senses seemed to suddenly take flight.

"They must not know I still live," muttered the girl, faintly, "for that would part them surely, as cruelly as though one of them lay in the grave."

She could not pass by them, and there was no other means of exit. With an effort born surely of despair Paula nerved herself for the ordeal, and flashed like a meteor past the open doorway.

No one observed her, so deeply were their thoughts engrossed by other matters, and like a meteor she glided into the street, never stopping to even catch her breath until she found herself in the black below, and quite out of sight.

Weak and fainting, she sunk down under a friendly porch and tried to think; and in this position Jane Bolton, who was hurrying rapidly towards the Branton mansion in response to the summons, came across her.

"Paula!" she gasped, scarcely believing the evidence of her own eyes. "What are you doing here?"

But Paula had reached that stage when recognition was past all thought with her.

Jane went up to her gently and touched her on the hand.

"Paula," she asked again, "what are you doing here? Is this not your wedding-day?"

The girl's lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

Jane put her strong young arms round her friend, and raised her gently to her feet.

"I cannot understand the meaning of this," she exclaimed to herself.

Paula burst into tears, and struggled from her embrace.

"Come home with me, Paula," she said, authoritatively. "You are ill and in great trouble. Come home and tell me what Mrs. Branton has done to you, when she drove away with you in such apparent peace and harmony. I had a foreboding at the time that all was not well, and I find my misgivings were correct. If she has ill-treated you, she shall hear from me, though she were a hundred times a millionaire!"

Jane succeeded in leading her gently to her humble home.

Once there she succeeded in forcing Paula to swallow a glass of strong wine, that had the effect of steadying the girl's somewhat shattered nerves; and then the whole story came out from beginning to end.

Paula could keep it no longer, and she longed with all her heart to find someone she could make a confidant of, and who would advise her just what to do.

Jane Bolton proved herself this friend in need; she rose to the occasion.

"You are very foolish, my dear, to wreck your happiness for a cause like that. Surely you should realise that you will not be separating Mildred and her lover, from the fact that they know you no longer care for him—else, they know, you would not be about to marry another. Take my advice and face the music, and you will find that it will end in the happiest and gladiest re-union that can well be imagined. I myself will break to them the glad intelligence that you still live."

"Oh, Jane, if I only thought it!" gasped Paula, buoyed up by Jane's golden words and brilliant promise.

"You must accompany me," said Jane, "and remain outside until I send a messenger for you. They are expecting me, you know, and will not think my coming amiss."

Eagerly, longingly, yet reluctantly, Paula complied with her request.

She stood at the nearest corner, as if waiting for an omnibus, while Jane went on ahead.

It seemed an age to her until the door of the grand mansion midway down the street opened, and she saw two figures fairly fly down the steps toward her. It needed but one glance to tell her that they were Gregor and Mildred coming in search of her.

The next moment the two sisters were clasped in each other's arms, and despite their surroundings, were sobbing on each other's breasts.

"Oh, Mildred, I did not mean to wreck your life a second time!" she began. But Mildred covered the girl's mouth with her hand.

"Let us make this compact, dear," she said: "The past will be for ever past with us. We will live only for the future. Mr. Branton, your lover, is awaiting you. Oh, darling, I almost died of joy when I learned the startling story of who the bride was! Oh, Paula! Paula! deeply as I love you, I must censure you for not having more confidence in your poor Mildred. But come: every moment is precious; the clergyman is already awaiting you and wondering where you are. Everyone thinks that you must have wanted some adjunct to your wedding toilet and stepped out to purchase it. No one would ever dream that a bride-alect could find it in her heart to run away from so handsome and deserving a lover as Mr. Branton. Even Frank quite believes each moment that you will return—he is so anxious for the ceremony to proceed. But do you know, dear, I have quite a little plan on hand; if we can make it a suitable arrangement, to postpone the marriage for a fortnight and make it a double one."

By this time the two sisters had re-entered the

house, and were making their way towards the sick-room.

Joyful were the next few moments to all assembled.

The ceremony was scarcely over ere the doctor, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, ordered every one peremptorily from the room, declaring he had a pleasant surprise in store for them in the course of a short time.

Wonderingly they all filed out of the sick-room—even Paula. Five, ten minutes passed in happy conversation in the adjoining room, and then the door suddenly opened, and, to their intense surprise, Frank Branton, handsome, cool, and audacious, walked into the room, bowing and smiling. Paula gasped, and Mrs. Branton shrieked aloud for joy.

"You must all please pardon me for my little ruse," he said, gallily, "for it was the only way that I knew to gain the consent of the girl I loved. Our good doctor is principally responsible, for he was the main conspirator in the plot when he found I was unharmed from an accident I received this morning. So now that Paula is bound to me as fast as love and law can make her mine, I have no hesitancy, you see, in divulging this scheme of winning my sweetheart, Paula, for they say 'All is fair in love and war.'"

It was the merriest day the inmates of that grand old mansion ever knew, and the day came when Mrs. Branton loved her son's wife with a fondness far surpassing that which she felt for Frank himself.

Paula kept no secret from her husband. She told him the whole story of her life from beginning to end.

At last, at Paula's earnest solicitation, they went to Switzerland to make it their home, and Gregor and Mildred, accompanied by Mrs. Morris, who would not be parted from the dear girl, soon followed them. Gregor and Frank put up grand mansions side by side, and there the two sisters lived, each with her adoring husband; and of each of them, so happy in her wedded bliss, it might be said that they were as happy as mortals in this world can well be.

Some years after, Miss Dawes, sojourning in Switzerland, stopped to admire the two beautiful residences which seemed to be occupied by English people.

A girl of some five summers stood before the arched gate, and by her side was a handsome boy perhaps a year her senior.

"What is your name, my dear?" asked Miss Dawes, stopping to admire the girl's singular beauty.

The little one raised her great, dark velvety eyes, and pushed back her dark, athen rings from her dimpled rosy face with the daintiest of little hands.

"My papa calls me 'My Sweetheart Paula,'" she answered, gravely. "I once had a little baby brother, Jean, whom we all loved so much. But Baby Jean died, and they wanted to call me that; but my papa said no; and so they called me instead Mignon Branton."

"You did not ask me my name," said the boy; "and I think that I am of as much account as a girl. My name is Gregor Morris Thorpe, and when I get big I'm going to England and be a big lawyer. That is my mamma and papa coming over yonder, and the pretty lady with them is my auntie. Her name, though you haven't asked to know it, is just like my cousin's here," said the boy—"not Sweetheart Paula, but M. A. Paula Mignon Branton."

[THE END]

THE Japanese torpedo-boats have received names entirely out of keeping with their modern style and destructive purposes. These names are very poetical and picturesque, and belong to the vocabulary of pure old Japanese words which are rapidly passing out of common use. The following are examples: Dragon Fly, Full Moon, Moon in Clouds, Sea, Beach, Peewit, Lightning, Thunder, Dawn of Day, Clustering Clouds, Day-break, Ripples, Evening Mist, Dragon's Lamp, Falcon, Magpie, White Naped Crane, White Hawk.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen will remain in Scotland for four weeks.

The Duchess of Cleveland is the sole survivor of Queen Victoria's bridesmaids.

THE costliest rugs in the world are owned by the Shah of Persia and the Sultan of Turkey. It is said that each possesses a rug covered with pearls and diamonds valued at a fabulous sum.

PETERHOF is to be the headquarters of the Imperial Court during the next three months, the Emperor and Empress residing at the villa of Alexandria in the park.

THE Queen, anxious to minimise all risk of a conflagration at Balmoral, commands that while she is residing in the Castle no fuel shall be used but birchwood, which causes extremely little smoke or soot, and all the chimneys are swept once a fortnight.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS ADOLPHUS OF TECK, who have been staying a great deal at Eaton with the Duke and Duchess of Westminster during the last few months, are going to pass the summer at Windsor, where they have taken Glen Aray, a very nice place near Queen Anne's Ride.

QUEEN NATALIE OF SERBIA has made up her mind to follow the example of the Queen of Roumania, who is well known in the literary world by her pseudonym, Carmen Sylva. For the last two months Queen Natalie has been occupied in writing a personal romance which opens in Servia and ends in Biarritz. It is written in French, and is to be published in Paris.

THE Tsar has invited the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Roumania, with their pretty little children, to spend some weeks at Peterhof, so that the Tsaritsa may have her favourite cousin with her during her convalescence. The children of both families will naturally also be a source of great amusement to each other and their parents.

THE Prince of Wales is probably the champion godfather in Great Britain, his record being seventy-five occasions on which he has officiated in that capacity. He also holds another unique record in this respect; in having stood as godfather to the Duke of Marlborough as well as to the Duke of Marlborough's infant heir—that is, godfather to both the father and son.

THE visiting card of the Emperor William of Germany is a real curiosity. It is printed on glazed Bristol board five inches long and three-and-a-half inches wide. It is engraved with the name "Wilhelm" in large Gothic characters, and beneath it, in letters almost as large, "German Emperor and King of Prussia." Naturally there is no address. The stationer in Berlin who turns them out, with special envelopes to match, delivers to his Imperial client from twenty to thirty thousand cards a year, and the Emperor uses no others.

WHEN the Queen and the Court go to Balmoral, Princess Beatrice travels to Germany, and after a stay at Kissingen, will go on a visit to the late Prince Henry's only sister, the Countess d'Erbach-Schönberg, also to Princess Louise of Battenberg and to the Empress Frederic. Princess Henry will be away from a month to six weeks, and Princess Leiningen and Princess Louise Marchioness of Lorne will be with the Queen.

THE Duke and Duchess of York will visit Exeter on July 4th to open the new wing of the Albert Memorial Museum. The announcement of the pending visit has given much satisfaction in the "Ever faithful" city, where Royal visitors have been rare, but previous disappointments will doubtless be forgotten in the promise of the approaching visit of the Duke and Duchess of York. It was hoped that the function of the opening of the new wing of the Albert Memorial Museum might be combined with the festivities associated with the Bath and West Show, but this idea had to be abandoned. During their visit to the West, the Duke and Duchess will stay with Lord and Lady Clifford at Ugbrook Park, Chudleigh.

STATISTICS.

A CATERPILLAR can eat 600 times its weight of food in a month.

THERE are about 11,000,000 Jews in the world, half of them under Russian jurisdiction.

It is said that the peasant of the South of France spends on food for a family of five an average of twopence a day.

GEMS.

THE softer the road the harder it is to travel.

THERE is hope for the man who doesn't have to fall down more than once to learn how to stand up.

EVEN the wisest are long in learning that there is no better work for them than the bit God puts into their hands.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICE PUDDING.—Well wash two ounces of rice. Put one pint of milk in a pan on the fire to boil. When it boils, sprinkle in the rice. Boil gently with the lid on, till thick and creamy. It will probably take three quarters of an hour. Then stir in one tablespoonful of sugar, and a few drops of any flavouring. Pour in a slightly-battered pie-dish, and cook in the oven till a nice brown skin has formed on the top.

JOULE'S SHORT BISCUITS.—Four ozs. fine flour, 4 ozs. rice flour, 2½ ozs. castor sugar, 5 ozs. butter, 1 tablespoon ground almonds; beat butter and sugar together, then add the flour and almonds; the paste should be smooth and stiff, roll to about ½ inch or less in thickness and cut into fancy shapes; put a bit of citron or orange peel on top of each, and bake in a moderate oven till a little brown; remove from the tin when cold, and dust over with sugar.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LIONS and tigers are too weak in lung power to run more than half a mile.

THE floors in French hospitals are painted with a solution of paraffin in petroleum for hygienic reasons. One application lasts two years.

THERE are 2,700 veins in an inch of coloured mother-of-pearl. Iris ornaments of all colours are made by lines on steel from 2,000 to the 10,000th part of an inch.

A PAIR of gloves passes through nearly two hundred hands, from the moment that the skin leaves the dresser's till the time when the gloves are purchased.

THE "ink plant" grows in New Grenada. Its juice can be used for writing without any preparation. At first the writing is red, but in a few hours it becomes black.

THE "pathometer," a new invention for use on bicycles and other vehicles, not only automatically records the distance travelled, but also the directions of the routes traversed.

THE strongest sentiment of the Turk is his reverence to his mother. He always stands in her presence until invited to sit down—a compliment he pays to no one else.

VESEVUS was covered by a heavy snowfall recently, while the crater was in eruption. The Neapolitans watched the unusual spectacle of three streams of red-hot lava working their way through the white snow.

A FLY 30 minutes at a time is almost invisible has been calculated to make no less than 540 steps in the time a healthy man would breathe once. A man with proportionate agility could run twenty-four miles a minute.

FACETIE.

TOM: "After all, what are kisses good for?" Kitty (demurely): "Their face value."

"Is I get sick, my dear, send me to the hospital." "What! Among all those pretty nurses! I guess not!"

HE: "They say that bees often travel 3,000 miles in migrating!" SHE: "Suppose we migrate on our wedding trip."

ETHEL (showing her engagement-ring): "Don't you admire his taste!" MAUD: "Y-es, so far as jewellery is concerned."

FRIEND: "Do you permit your wife to have her own way?" Husband (positively): "No, sir. She has it without my permission."

THE MEDIUM: "The spirit of your husband is here, if you wish to ask him any questions." The Widow: "I want to ask him where he has been."

HE: "Is she his first wife?" SHE: "Well, as he married her again after divorcing her, she is what you might call his first wife once removed."

WIFE: "Did you read about the man who married one woman thinking she was another?" Husband: "Pshaw! I did the same thing myself."

"I'm afraid I won't be able to get through," faltered the young knight, preparing for his first tourney. "Never fear!" grinned his opponent, as he playfully poised his lance, "I'll run you through!"

WIFE: "Did the dealer say he'd send that ton of coal you ordered?" Husband: "Yes, he said he would, but I doubt it. He probably won't send more than seventeen hundred pounds."

RETURNED TOURIST: "Is Mr. Goodheart still paying attentions to your daughter?" "Indeed he isn't paying her any attention at all." "Indeed! Did he jilt her?" "No, he married her."

BEANO (who has been dining at the club with Jenks): "Just come in a minute, old fellow, and have a night-cap." Jenks: "I am afraid it's getting a little late. Let's see, how's the enemy?" Beano: "Oh, that's all right. She's in bed."

"I WILL be a sister to you," said the fair maiden. "I've got one sister who wears my neckties, borrows cab-fares, loses my hairbrushes, puts knick-knacks all over the furniture in my room, and expects me to take her to the theatre twice a week. I don't want any more sisters."

"How do you always manage to have such delicious meat?" asked one housekeeper of another. "Well, I select a good, honest butcher, and then stand by him." "You mean that you give him all your trade?" "No," said the other woman; "I mean that I stand by him while he is cutting the meat."

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Mrs. G.—S.—: Taylor Mines.—We beg to acknowledge, with many thanks, renewal of your subscription.

BARNESMAN.—Wedding favours are dying out, and are only occasionally offered to the wedding guests, when they take the form of a small bouquet of real staphoeads and myrtle, tied with a little bow of white satin ribbon.

NOT USED TO CHILDREN.—A work-basket, a writing-desk, or a box of bricks is always appreciated by a child. Endless amusement can be had from these toys. Children also dearly love anything which has a key and can be locked.

Mrs. GEORGE.—Strain the stained part over a bowl, cover with salt, and pour boiling water through till all trace is removed. The great thing in treating stains is to apply your remedies before the discoloured part has had time to dry.

UNEDUCATED.—Classical is a term applied in music, as in art and literature, to such works as have held their place in general estimation for a considerable time, and to such new works as are generally considered to be of the same type and style.

JENNIE.—Springs of wine is the best thing for the purpose. Dip a camel's hair brush in it, and brush the trimming till all dirt is removed. Jet passanterie can be cleaned by rubbing with a cloth dipped in equal parts of alcohol and water. Dry with a clean cloth.

A POINT OF ENQUÊTE.—The lady must first recognise and salute a gentleman upon next meeting him after being introduced. If the lady desires to have no further acquaintance with persons so introduced, she will of course make no recognition upon next meeting.

A READER OF TWELVE YEARS.—You are correct in your assertion. The people you mention have no children living. We, in turn, must thank you for your long patronage, and kind expressions of approval, which afford us the greatest pleasure. We shall always be happy to hear from you.

MINNA.—Tees and wine stains can be removed from linen by steeping in a solution of chloride of lime, one ounce to one pint of water. Do not allow the linen to remain in the solution after once the stain is removed, and it must be at once rinsed with cold water, then washed and dried.

DICKIE.—Voodoo is the name of a degraded form of superstition and sorcery, said to include human sacrifice and cannibalism in some of its rites. It still exists in Hayti, and among a certain class of negroes in the Southern States of America. It is regarded as a relic of African barbarism.

DETRACTED SUITOR.—If you love the young lady and wish to marry her, you had better tell her and end your uncertainty. Your frequent quarrels are probably a result of delaying a settlement of the matter in one way or the other. In cases like yours delays and uncertainties cause untold trouble.

ROLLING STONE.—We are unable to say how employment is to be got abroad for a man who cannot find it at home; your position seems miserable enough, but if there does not seem anything at all at home that you could turn your hand to, we fear there will be difficulty in getting you anywhere.

LETTIE.—Dissolve a heaped teaspoonful of borax in half a gallon of boiling water. Put the silver into a bowl, and pour the borax and water over. Let soak for an hour or two, take out of the water one thing at a time, wipe dry with a clean cloth, rubbing well and polish with a soft camels leather.

STAGE-STUCK.—We should advise you to consider the matter very carefully if you are thinking of studying for the stage. Unless you are convinced that you have unusual talent, and are willing to face great hardships and possible failure, you had better give up the idea. It is a hard life, and there is no royal road through it.

PHIL.—To colour a meerschaum, fill the pipe and smoke down to about one-third, or to the height to which you wish to colour it. Leave the remainder of the tobacco in the pipe, and do not empty it or disturb it for several weeks, or until the desired colour is obtained. When smoking, put fresh tobacco on top and smoke to the same level.

MIDNET.—We are afraid that the use of false soles in your shoes will not increase your height appreciably. They are a clumsy contrivance, and hardly practicable. We should advise you to cease worrying about your lack of inches. Tall people by no means have all the advantages in this world, and no doubt there are many of them who would gladly exchange their height for yours.

BARTON.—Edward the Third, about 1341, was first to assume the title of "King of Great Britain and France." British monarchs continued to bear French title down to the time of George III.; in June, 1801, it was dropped; the monarchy acquired it by right of birth, marriage, and conquest; the relations between England and France being in the earlier years of history very close indeed.

BUTTERFLY.—The following is one of the French dry cleaning methods, and if the dress is not very dirty you will find it most satisfactory. Heat some flour in the oven, and rub this well into every soiled part of the serge; shake and brush afterwards till all the flour is removed, and repeat the process if necessary. If the garment is very dirty, it is best to send it to a professional cleaner.

COCKNEY.—It is not always easy to decide what is covered by the term "London"; the Parliamentary boundaries, for instance, included a population of 4,282,118 in 1891, and that in 1896 was estimated to have increased to 4,488,018; the Metropolitan and City Police district, again, had 4,760,651 inhabitants in 1891, and 5,033,906 in 1896; this is the latest estimate; the larger district includes about 700 square miles of country.

MOLLIE.—When lamps are clogged with oil the burners should be boiled in a strong solution of soda and water, and allowed to get thoroughly dry before being used again. To prevent the chimneys from cracking, put them into a saucepan or pot of cold water, with hay laid between them to prevent them from jarring, and let them boil. Then set the pan aside for the lamp chimneys to grow cold in the water before removing and drying them.

BELLE OF NEW YORK.—The Tuilleries was a palace built on the site of an old hotel of that name, so called because there were the works there. The place was then outside the city limits. Francis I. bought the property as a present to his mother, the Duchess of Angoulême. It was afterwards chosen by Catherine de Medici as a site of the new palace. The building was begun in 1554. It was burned by the Commune in 1871, only a portion of two wings remaining. Gardens now occupy the greater portion of the former site.

AMATEUR.—To make whitewash, take half a bushel of unslaked lime with boiling water, keeping it covered during the process. Strain it, and add a peck of salt, dissolved in hot water; three pounds of ground rice put in boiling water and boiled to a thin paste, one half pound Spanish whiting, and a pound of clean glue dissolved in warm water. Mix these well together and let the mixture stand several days. This should be applied as hot as it is possible to keep it. For a blue tint, add a little indigo bluing.

A PERFECT FRIGHT.—We do not think you can have attributed the fact of your hair falling off to the proper cause. Curling pins of a reliable make should do no injury to the hair. Perhaps you have been in the habit of using hot tongs. This would ruin the finest head of hair. Or perhaps with you it is constitutional, or hereditary. You may remedy it to some extent by the application of the following lotion: Tincture of cantharides, two drachms; spirit of rosemary, one ounce; acetic acid, one ounce; rose water to make eight ounces. Get this prescription made up, and apply a little night and morning to the scalp, and keep the hair from getting too dry by occasionally rubbing in castor oil. Thank you for your kind remarks about the LONDON READER. It is a great pleasure for us to hear our efforts to please our readers are appreciated, and that we are successful in doing so.

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A REMARKABLE STORY.

THE following facts were obtained at first hand and are wholly accurate and trustworthy. The story has no likeness to the numerous wonder tales which have no better foundation than gossip and imagination. The occurrence, should it prove to be true, was deemed of so great importance that a special messenger was detailed to visit the spot with instructions to inquire carefully and thoroughly into every point of the case; with the understanding that if his investigation bore out the statements earliest made, a sufficiently full account was to be published for the information and benefit of the public. His report being clear and satisfactory, a condensed summary of it is here given:—

It seems that a respectable family named Skinner resides at 34, High Street, Banbury, Oxon. In the summer of 1895 a son, William Skinner, now about eighteen years old, met with an accident—a heavy fall, such as might happen to anyone. Fortunately no bones were broken and his friends naturally expected he would soon get over it. But he did not. Instead of recovering his strength he became weak and irritable. Although there was no injury calling for surgical interference, the lad's system appeared to be profoundly shaken. His appetite, previously robust, as with all healthy fellows of his age, grew poor and fitful. The attempt to build him up on food was consequently a failure. The liquid food, of which he took a limited amount, had no effect. He gained no strength from it. In spite of medical treatment young Skinner lost flesh at a frightful rate, his bones threatening to protrude through the skin.

The condition of his nerves was equally peculiar and alarming. He was constantly twitching and totally unable to sit still or to remain quiet. Bad as his experience was by day he was always worse at night. He obtained so little material sleep that the doctor was obliged to administer sleeping draughts—a course which no medical man adopts when it can be avoided. When awake, so great was the poor boy's nervousness, that he could not endure to be approached or spoken to. The very sight of him is said by the neighbours to have been a pitiable one to witness. People who called to see him out of sympathy and to offer any services they might be able to render, were of one mind; they said he could not possibly recover. Looking upon her son's deplorable and apparently hopeless state his broken-hearted mother said, "*I pray that God may take him.*"

Yet merciful death did not come to his relief. For over two years he lingered on, sometimes a trifle better, as was believed, and then relapsing into his former condition. The local doctor diagnosed the disease as St. Vitus' dance, and treated the patient for several months on that theory of the case; unhappily without good

result. In view of obtaining the highest medical opinion of this mysterious affliction the lad was then taken for examination to the National Hospital, London, and afterwards admitted to the Banbury Hospital, where he remained three months, with no material improvement; the physicians' judgment being that there was no hope for him. Thus nearly a year went by.

In May, 1896, his indefatigable mother—who fought for her offspring as only mothers will—on a letter of recommendation, took the poor stricken boy to the Convalescent Home at Eastbourne, and then again to the National Hospital in London, with no better outcome than before. On his return home William Skinner was to all appearance a complete wreck, his mind being quite unhinged. He was tenderly replaced in bed, as much dead as alive, and there remained, virtually a breathing corpse, month after month, season after season. His inherent vitality, his unconscious hold on life, surprised all who saw him. But, plainly, the end could not be much longer delayed.

Events now bring us to September, 1897, when the unexpected happened, as it so often does. A friend of the family, Mrs. Jewell of Sibford, called. In conversation on the boy's illness she urged the immediate use of a remedy known as Mother Seigel's Syrup, telling what it had done for her husband at a time when other treatment was unavailing. On this advice Mrs. Skinner acted, taking the responsibilities upon herself. In a short time—when the sufferer's desperate state is considered—there was a marked improvement. He could eat with some relish, the food causing no distress or reaction.

Other medicines were entirely laid aside and dependence placed on this one alone; but the result justified this seemingly rash proceeding. Little by little the lad gained strength; climbing, so to speak, from the verge of the grave. As his body grew stronger his mind cleared and brightened. To the amazement of friends and physicians in two months' time he was able to leave the house and go about. At the date of this writing, February 4, 1898, William Skinner is in robust health, and his terrible experience of the past two years is but a fast-fading memory. His mother insists that his life was saved by Mother Seigel's Syrup, and nobody of the many who followed the case from the start is inclined to dispute her opinion.

With a frankness which does them honour several of the doctors concede the marvellous cure, and say that probably the lad's fall caused a shock which produced a profound disturbance, almost amounting to an overthrow, of the digestive functions, which in turn reacted on the nerves—the *fons et origo mali* being the digestion. The remedy alluded to removed that at the last possible moment, and recovery followed.



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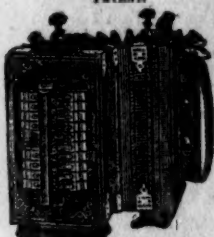
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